

Culture and Civilization in the Middle East

BEDOUIIN AND ‘ABBĀSID CULTURAL IDENTITIES

THE ARABIC MAJNŪN LAYLĀ STORY

Ruqayya Yasmine Khan



Bedouin and ‘Abbāsid Cultural Identities

This literary-historical book draws out and sheds light upon the mechanisms of “the ideological work” that the Arabic *Majnūn Laylā* story performed for ‘Abbāsid urbanite, imperial audiences in the wake of the disappearance of the “Bedouin cosmos.”

The study focuses upon the processes of primitivizing Majnūn in the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* as part of the paradigm shift that occurred in the ‘Abbāsid empire after the Greco-Arabian intellectual revolution. Moreover, this book demonstrates how gender and sexuality are employed in the processes of primitivizing Majnūn. As markers of “strangeness” and “foreignness” in the ‘Abbāsid interrogations of the multiple categories of ethnicity, culture, identity, religion and language present in their cosmopolitan milieus. Such “cultural work” is performed through the ideological uses of alterity given its mechanisms of distancing (e.g., temporal and spatial) and nearness (e.g., affective). Lastly, the *Majnūn Laylā* love story demonstrates, in its text and reception, that a Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian subculture thrived in the centers of ‘Abbāsid Baghdad that molded and shaped the ways in which this love story was compiled, received and performed.

Offering a corrective to the prevailing views expressed in Western scholarly writings on the Greco-Arabian encounter, this book is a major contribution to scholars and students interested in Islamic studies, Arabic and comparative literature, Middle East and gender studies.

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Ruqayya Yasmine Khan

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**To the beloved memory of my dearest Ammi and Mother,
Rashida Begum Khan, November 1, 2018**

إِنَّا لِلّٰهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

and

To John Edward Sepich



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Preface

On the evening of June 29, 2018, I sat and watched *Orfeo and Majnūn* being performed at La Monnaie, Brussels' beautiful, stately Opera House. It was performed in French and Arabic (with Dutch subtitles on electronic screens), and it had a full orchestra. The backdrop on stage consisted of large screens with contemporary, abstract images (e.g., of the earth and moon and other orbs in slate, aqua, black, silver and pale green colors) accompanied now and then by outsized, white figures of animals in the corners: reindeer, ram, gazelle. This was a community production in some ways, and local school students were also involved, alternating the times at which they sat in rows on each side of the stage. In effect, I was witness to a contemporary, hybrid rendition of an operatic *Majnūn Laylā* that, at times, made me feel like I was watching an Arab *Romeo and Juliet*; at other times, the 1960s American musical *Hair* came to mind; and yet at other moments, it seemed I was viewing something akin to a classical Greek opera. The audience appeared multicultural and hip, with native, white Belgians as well as many Belgian-Arabs and Belgian-Africans in attendance. Tickets started at eight euros.

As I watched, I felt the twinges of being in the presence of something so large, inexpressible and indescribable: the use of myth and symbol to bridge the chasms of so-called East and West – Brussels, marked by segregated neighborhoods of affluent white Belgians and the Arab immigrant quarters, Brussels with growing African and Arab diasporic populations. Watching the opera made me confront thoughts and feelings linked with death, loss, old age, youth, love, longing, sickness, madness, boredom, passion, dance and magic . . . I can go on. Homeland, difference, yearning, childhood, strangeness, mother, beloved, poetry, desire, God, forgiveness, vengeance, betrayal, money, parents, beauty, elegance, night and darkness, east and west, meaning, pain, joy, delusion, isolation, wildness, ecstasy. Was it art? Was it myth? Was it philosophy of love? Orpheo is saying: you are ravishing my soul. . . . Whatever it is, it works, I thought.

When I first heard about this opera *Orfeo and Majnūn*, I wondered why Orpheus or Orfeo? That winter of 2018, as I put the finishing touches on my book manuscript about this classical Arabic love story, I no longer had to wonder why: among the gems of discoveries I made when I repeatedly assessed the Arabic textual material was how much of the story is about the Arab encounter with Greek

heritage: Greek ideas about love, madness, inspiration, nostalgia, language, poetics and truth, selfhood and the body. And how much this love story represents processes of “othering”. The oral and written growth of this love story in the period spanning the eighth century to the tenth century in the Arab Baghdadi milieu was exactly the time of the unfolding of the monumental and massive engagement with the Greek textual heritage of Aristotle, Galen, Plato and Socrates. I view this love story as saturated with Greek ideas and notions from a time when such ideas took Baghdad by storm – Baghdad, as the cosmopolitan capital of the ‘Abbāsid Empire, at the time populated by Muslims including Arabs and Persians as well as Christians and Jews. By the time al-Iṣfahānī compiled this story, it chronologically was several centuries after the massive Greco-Arabian translation projects – but the influx of ideas and trends from the Greek context was still strong, and of course, the story (given its oral origins and nature) is layered with several chronological contexts, as I argue in this book.

The day after I saw the opera of *Orfeo and Majnūn*, I walked the streets of downtown Belgium and came upon a rally commemorating the assassination of the Congolese freedom fighter Patrice Lumumba and recalling the imperialist interventions in Congolese politics by both the United States and Belgium. Several hundred people converged, and a Congolese “Majnūn” yelled at the top of his voice about Lumumba as he stood shackled in one arm by the Belgian police. I asked the Moroccan taxicab driver about living in Brussels – it’s wonderful, he said, but the terrorist incidents had driven tourists away and business was affected. I returned to Paris – *Orfeo and Majnūn* was coming to France, at Aix-en-Provence in two weeks, after already having been performed in Malta. It did not matter that Arabs, those living in Arab countries, had almost relegated Majnūn to the sidelines – the Bahraini poet Qassim Haddad’s *Chronicles of Majnūn Laylā* (rendered into exquisite English translation by Ferial Ghazoul and John Verlenden) brought tears to my eyes. At last, a contemporary Arab literary figure rightfully had recaptured the pulsating vibrancy and grandness of the original Arabic love story and brought it to life. No matter that religious and political Bahraini pundits (and maybe others outside of Bahrain) were engaged in polemical disputes against it. I did not have to look for and find Majnūn alive and well in only the Arab Middle East and Europe – months before, I had missed Mark Morris’ production of *Majnūn Laylā* in New York and San Francisco. In vain did I seek to find some visuals from what looked like an amazing show. But I value my having witnessed a kind of revival of that type of Greek-Arab encounter in time and place so different . . . about fifteen hundred years later in a somewhat sleepy and staid European capital, Brussels, enriched by the diversity of new, diasporic Arab and African populations.

Acknowledgments

This book has been an act of love and labor amid the time period of the loss of my dear and beloved mother, Rashida Begum Khan. Losing her is a primal loss, one that is profoundly indescribable. Without her devotion to and the care for my then infant son, Mikail Khan, and without her steady, loving support at the most vital stage in the completion of my doctoral degree, my dissertation on *Majnūn Laylā* would not have been completed. But there are others whose love and labor helped me to finish this book: my husband, John, had many, enlightening discussions with me about this love story, and I am tremendously thankful to him for these exchanges as well as for his constant encouragement throughout the writing process of this book. Moreover, my son, Mikail, likewise, engaged in eye-opening conversations with me and performed certain rereadings and changes that were timely and crucial. Thank you so much to my colleague in the Humanities, Lori Anne Ferrell, and presently the Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at Claremont Graduate University, for promptly and thoughtfully putting me in touch with Routledge Press. For an excellent, “hands-on” and timely launch of this book, all my gratitude goes to Joe Whiting (Acquisitions Editor) and Titanilla Panczel (Editorial Assistant), Routledge Middle East, Islamic and Jewish Studies; as well as to Kevin Kelsey, Project Manager with Apex CoVantage. Thank you also to number of graduate students for putting up with me during key moments and phases of examining the Arabic love story and getting the manuscript ready, including Mahdi Qazwini, Ayat Agha and Robin Lehleitner. All imperfections, errors, omissions and the like that remain in the text of this book are my responsibility alone. Last but not least, I remain ever grateful to Everett Rowson, my mentor and advisor, for his meticulous tutelage and guidance at the time of my original research conducted on this world-renowned Middle Eastern love story at the University of Pennsylvania.



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Introduction

Once upon a time in the ‘Abbāsid Islamic capital of Baghdad of the ninth and tenth centuries, “genteel savants”¹ of Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian court-centered circles fashionably wore Greek signet rings in which were inscribed the maxims of Socrates, Plato or Aristotle. Such rings “were sometimes given as a keepsake to a beloved one although this habit was disapproved by some people” who presumably were not part of this clique of avant-garde “genteel savants.”² Among the most popular entertainment gigs³ in town for ‘Abbāsid Baghdādī elite society was the performance in song and verse of a most famous love story – namely, the love story known in Arabic as *Majnūn Laylā*⁴ – that featured a rather ancient, queer⁵ and transgressive Bedouin poet who was a “tree man” – that is, he lived among trees and with desert wild animals after losing his beloved due to indiscretions in his poetry.

This book argues that these two elements, when taken together and analyzed fully, provide a vibrant window into a paradigm shift that occurred in the ‘Abbāsid empire after the Greco-Arabian intellectual revolution. Its impact lasted for over several centuries (about two hundred and fifty years), and the shift generated new and dynamic Islamic off-shoots including Islamic philosophy and Islamic mysticism. This transformation created a worldview of ironic, ludic distance vis-à-vis the Bedouin past, including the iterations of *al-Jahilīyya* (the era of “pre-Islamic Bedouin ignorance”).⁶ The Bedouin past suddenly became an object of fascination and entertainment. Such Greco-Arabian ideas and subcultures informed how male ‘Abbāsid Muslim identities were interrogated and scrutinized as part of an overall process of ‘Abbāsid collective identity formation. The ‘Abbāsid-era *Majnūn Laylā* story offers a window into this unfolding paradigm shift.

The love story of Majnūn Laylā

The tenth-century love story known in Arabic as *Majnūn Laylā* is arguably the most famous love story in the Islamic Middle East, not to mention in the whole of the Islamic world. As a romance, it occupies an iconic status within the cultural and literary traditions of Islamic civilization somewhat comparable to (if one were instead to imagine it within the European literary milieu) a combination of Shakespeare’s sixteenth-century *Romeo and Juliet* and Cervantes’ seventeenth-century

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Don Quixote put together. Versions of the Arabic love story span both classical and modern eras, and the romance has traversed across all language boundaries: the love story is found, for example, in the literatures of Azerbaijan, Turkish, Urdu, Hindi, Malay and Tamil languages. Moreover, in the medieval context, there blossomed a Persian tradition of this story in the form of versified narratives and mystical allegories. These included the twelfth-century Persian poet Nizāmī's influential *Laylī Majnūn* in his famous compendium *al-Khamsa*, which was then followed by, for example, the fifteenth-century Persian poet Jāmī's *Laylā wal-Majnūn* and also his *Yūsuf and Zulaykhā* in his compendium *Haft Awrang*. The story also has inspired a wide range of visual, performative and film traditions such as Indian Mughal miniature art, modern Arabic dramas (e.g., Egyptian poet and playwright Ahmad Shawqī's drama *Majnūn Laylā*), films (e.g., a 1976 Urdu Bollywood film directed by Harnam Singh Rawail), Western rock music (Eric Clapton's "Layla"), and Russian ballet performances.

Some basics regarding the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*: it is "a boy meets girl story," but it belongs to the Arabic 'Uḏhrī literary subgenre, an elegiac amatory genre of poetry. The earliest full version of the *Majnūn Laylā* love story is found in the tenth-century multi-volume Arabic-language compendium titled *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, or *Book of Songs*, the magnum opus of Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, a "celebrated man of letters, a historian with sociological interests, a musicologist, and a poet"⁷ born in Baghdad in 897 CE.

A brief summary of the *Majnūn Laylā* story can be laid out as follows. First, it is important to clarify that there are three different beginnings for the story.⁸ The first beginning portrays the couple as Bedouin childhood sweethearts who together used to tend the pastoral flocks of their families. Once they reach puberty, the beloved is veiled or cloistered from her suitor, Majnūn. The second version represents their encounter as unfolding in a Persianized Arab cultural tableau replete with a bevy of young damsels, Majnūn's elegant discourse and dress, and his duel with a virile Arab goatherd. This version portrays them as youthful characters experiencing an attraction to each other within an Arab Bedouin-pseudo-Persianized setting that evokes poetry, flirtation and courtship. In what constitutes a third beginning of the *Majnūn Laylā* love story, Majnūn falls in love with the description of Laylā given to him:

So he heard of her [Laylā] and she was described to him, so he headed to her intending to visit her. He wore the best of clothes and used the best perfume he had, and he embarked on a camel he had and wore his sword and came to her, and he greeted her and she greeted him. He sat with her and they spoke to one another, and each one of them was impressed with the other.

(44–45)

Regardless which beginning is emphasized, after a brief period of courtship, during which Majnūn publicly serenades Laylā and declaims somewhat risqué poetry about his relationship with her, her family bars him from seeing her. Afraid that he might lose her, Majnūn then is shown asking for her hand in marriage,

but at about the same time, numerous other suitors from her tribe propose marriage to her as well and, ultimately, she accepts – or her kin (primarily her father) accept – a proposal from a rich man from a distant tribe. Majnūn consequently loses his mind, leaves society, and retires to the wilderness but continues to recite beautiful poetry about her that circulates in the region. Even after Laylā is married, the two of them are shown occasionally having trysts when her husband is away, and several anecdotes relate that her husband and lover engage in verbal jousts with each other over the issue of Majnūn's continued public declamation of poetry about her. Majnūn continues to roam madly about and dwell in the desert wilderness and is finally found one day dead among the sand and rocks by a tribesman who had sought him out for his poetry. Upon hearing news of his death, Laylā's father expresses regret over his harsh behavior with Majnūn and attends his funeral.

The “Bedouin cosmos”

The romance of *Majnūn Laylā*, as a “boy meets girl story,” is also an Islamic narrative of identity formation in and through engagement with the construct of what may be called the “Bedouin cosmos.”⁹ This book is about the Islamic ‘Abbāsid empire's recurrent engagement with and departure from this Bedouin cosmos in and through an analysis of the tenth-century *Majnūn Laylā*. After the revolution in Greek ideas during mid-to-late ‘Abbāsid culture and society, the Bedouin cosmos waxed and waned. The romance of *Majnūn Laylā* functions as an important literary vehicle by and through which to glimpse and comprehend this waxing and waning.

The phrase “Bedouin cosmos” is used once in passing by F. E. Peters in his book *Aristotle and the Arabs*, and while I have reservations about some of the language and tone of the passage I offer here, it deserves to be quoted in full:

The effects of the introduction of Aristotle into Islam were manifold. The first effect – and it is difficult to assess the full extent of this – was that the Aristotelian writings supplied a good deal of *knowledge* about the world and its workings to the early Muslim. They rendered him an intellectual cosmopolitan. Muhammad had created Islam with links leading back into the past, but only through a theological affiliation of considerably narrower dimensions than those of the Christian *praeparatio evangelica*. Aristotelianism provided Islam with a view of intellectual history and a sense of Hellenic antiquity. It introduced the Muslim to wholly new disciplines such as logic, biology, and mathematical geography. The Bedouin cosmos disappeared.¹⁰

A “cosmos” consists mainly of culturally inflected viewpoints containing a variety of images (including mythical and historical images) of the origin of the universe.¹¹ “Bedouin cosmos” is an apt phrase since the “origin and structure” of the religious universe of the ‘Abbāsids, namely the origin and edifice of Islam, historically and mythically lay in the Bedouin milieu. Their Bedouin cosmos, in

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part, designated a collection of images concerning the Bedouin Arabs of the foundational periods of Islam.

In this book, first, I emphasize that when the phrase “Bedouin cosmos” is invoked, it is mainly about the images and related construct and not about a historical reality or realities. Second, such a “Bedouin cosmos” was imagined, devised, disseminated and engaged with by the ‘Abbāsid Islamic empire (as the apogee of classical Islamic civilization) mainly in its urban, metropolitan capital of Baghdad. Hence, the phrase “Bedouin cosmos” functions to underscore an urbanized constructed view of the “desert nomadic Arabness” of the people in question; it refers to a metropolis-based cosmopolitan collection of images pertaining to the Arab nomadic Bedouins.¹² In other words, the construct of the “Bedouin cosmos” originates and functions principally in urban and urbane contexts and milieus.

Historically, the term or word ‘Arab or Arabs (*‘arab*) “as a designation for groups of people in Arabia and adjacent areas is documented continuously from the middle of the ninth century BCE to the present.”¹³ They were definitely dwellers in the Syrian desert in addition to Arabia. The term *bādiya* (which draws upon the Arabic root *b-d-w* for the word “Bedouin”) refers to the physical spaces where the Bedouin lived: hence, “living in the *bādiya* [implies] the areas outside fortified cities, especially steppes and deserts”¹⁴ – in other words, they were a nomadic Arab people of the steppes and deserts. The famous fifteenth-century Muslim historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406)

defines the people of the *badw* as those who dwell outside the cities, making their living as peasants or shepherds. The harder the living conditions, the stronger the sense of blood ties. These ties are strongest among the *‘arab* who live under the most extreme conditions of all and to whom tribal solidarity built on blood ties (*‘aṣabīyya*) is the defining feature of identity. The *‘arab* are thus a section of the *badw*, the people of the *bādiya* (the Bedouin), characterised by the importance of genealogical relations. Thus according to Ibn Khaldūn not all Bedouin are *‘arab*.¹⁵

The Arabic word “Bedouin” crops up (with biblical connotations), for instance, in the Qur’ān in Chapter 12 or Sūra al-Yūsuf, which concerns the Hebrew patriarch Joseph, who says to his father when he brings him back:

O my father! this is the fulfillment of my vision of old! God has made it come true! He was indeed good to me when He took me out of prison and brought you (all here) out of the desert [*min al-badw*], (even) after Satan had sown enmity between me and my brothers.

(12:100–101)

The *Majnūn Laylā* love story uses the words *‘arabīyyun* or *‘arab* in addition to and almost synonymously with this term “Bedouin.”

As an ‘Abbāsid construct, it is extremely important that the Bedouin cosmos includes in its imagery the foundational phase of Islam. After all, Islam’s founder

figure, the prophet Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah, was born, raised and preached his message within this Bedouin context. But the Bedouin cosmos also includes non-Islamic dimensions of pagan, nomadic Arabia, including traces of its Hellenistic Jewish and Christian circles. Furthermore, the construct also contains images of the Umayyad imperial dynasty that heralded the new capital of Damascus in Syria as the new community spread and was institutionalized beyond the confines of the Arabian peninsula in the mid-eighth century

Before the Greco-Arabian intellectual revolution, the Bedouin cosmos coincided with a primarily ‘Abbāsīd way of imagining and romanticizing *al-Jāhiliyya*. This was supremely the foundational era of the life of the prophet Muhammad and his missions in Mecca and Medina located in the Arabian Peninsula. Such an ‘Abbāsīd portrayal is and was characterized by the traditionalism that painted the age of the prophet as the golden age.¹⁶ After the Greco-Arabian intellectual and cultural seismic changes, there was an evanescence of the Bedouin cosmos along with that specific construct of *Jāhiliyya*. There still remained the Muhammad of Mecca and Medina, but now there also was Aristotle, Plato and Socrates, along with the urban centers of Athens, Alexandria, Damascus and Baghdad. The Bedouin cosmos did not disappear overnight; rather it faded slowly over centuries, which were marked by several periods of its waxing and waning or vice versa.

During the ‘Abbāsīd Būyid Age, in the aftermath of the Greco-Arabian (and as we shall see, to a distinct degree Greco-Persian) intellectual revolution, in Baghdad, urbane and urban male cultured elites formed various rival constituencies within and outside of what may be termed traditional Islamic science. These diverse and competing groups included “the male traditionists (*Hadīth* transmitters), theologians, jurists, grammarians, belletrists, scientists, and also *falāsifa*, the philosophers.”¹⁷ It must be underscored that these ‘Abbāsīd male elites were centered in the cosmopolitanism of urban Baghdad, and by and large, two trends informed these male cultivated constituencies, both engaged with the Bedouin cosmos in and through that specific construct of *Jāhiliyya*: one group clung to and surged back to the Bedouin cosmos even while it was waning, and the other departed from it even while never letting go of it completely. For the men of the first clique, an important part of the ‘Abbāsīd hermeneutical enterprise prior to the profound impact of the Greco-Arabian florescence was differentiating ‘*Aṣr al-Jāhiliyya* (Age of Ignorance and Impetuousness) from the ‘*Aṣr al-Hilm* (Age of Forbearance); the former demonized the era before Islam in the Arabian peninsula as an “age of pagan ignorance” and the latter idealized the age coming after the rise of Islam as an “age of enlightenment and forbearance.” It was mainly the traditionists – i.e., Hanbalī theologians, Qur’ān commentators (*mufasssīrūn*) and jurists (*fuqahā*) – who were most invested in *affectively* recouping the Bedouin cosmos because, for them, this cosmos as a set of images showcased the foundational phase of their religion. In other words, they clung to such a construct to establish and develop a religious cosmos and salvation history. They employed the Bedouin cosmos as a means to etch a definitive boundary maker that inaugurated the arrival of the new religion of Islam while, at the same time, decrying and jettisoning to some extent the non-Muslim “pagan” aspects of pre-Islamic Arabia

(the latter as epitomized in the quintessential figure of the ignorant and impetuous Bedouin). Likewise, they perceived and regarded aspects of the Umayyad caliphate – which historically immediately followed the era of the Prophet – as a political reign that continued and mimicked some of the irreverence and impiety of the pagan *Jāhiliyya* attitudes and practices, i.e., it mimicked aspects of the pagan Bedouin cosmos.

An alternative competing ‘Abbāsid male constituency – including Baghdadī belletrists, poets, scientists, and philosophers and a few theologians and jurists – began to *ironically* relate to the Bedouin cosmos through degrees of distance and impartiality. For these men, in the wake of the Greco-Arabian florescence, the Bedouin cosmos became an enterprise of ludic imagination rather than a matter of creating salvation history. They slowly began to render the Bedouin cosmos the object of a different kind of gaze – one shot through with elements of wonder, playfulness, scrutiny, imagination and entertainment. Hence, for this second group, both the ‘*Aṣr al-Jāhiliyya* (Age of Ignorance and Impetuousness) and the ‘*Aṣr al-Hilm* (Age of Forbearance) continued to intersect and interrelate in fascinating and entertaining ways, yet their reformulations of the Bedouin cosmos mitigated their inclinations to idealize or demonize the *jāhiliyya* and, with it, the prevailing constructs associated with the Umayyad caliphate and their *memoria*.¹⁸

Consequently, “there were many Bedouin cosmoses at play”, including several iterations of the ‘Abbāsid urbanized image of the Bedouin cosmos as either the idealized, Islamic foundation or the pagan irreverent non-Muslim other; then there were the ‘Abbāsid urbanized playful images of the exoticized, romanticized Bedouin cosmos and its Bedouin Arab primitive; also, the ‘Abbāsid constructs of the “paganized, impious” Umayyads that resonate with the image of the Bedouins as the outsiders to the new Islamic order – not to mention dimensions of the “real” Bedouin cosmos and other.¹⁹ These multiple and overlapping Bedouin cosmoses both chronologically waxed and waned as well as coexisted simultaneously in time and space. Around the time “the Bedouin cosmos disappeared” in one form, it could or would reappear in another form – it reappeared as an object of wonder and examination, of amusement and entertainment.

A narrative was promulgated around this time, i.e., the ‘Abbāsid ninth-century, which became highly popularized leading up to and beyond tenth-century – a narrative and story that rendered prominent the quintessential Bedouin. This popularization of the *Majnūn Laylā* story – in its development and reception – coincided with the Greco-Arabian revolution “that in the course of three or four generations whirled the ninth-century [‘Abbāsid] Muslim(s) through all the painful intellectual experiences that the Greeks had undergone in the time between Homer and Paul of Aegina.”²⁰ Here, the argument is not that there were particular or specific Greek ideas or sources to or upon which one can pin the exercise of influence on ‘Abbāsid reception and appropriation of the love story of *Majnūn Laylā*. Rather I maintain that the profound and deep transformations within the ‘Abbāsid capital of Baghdad as a consequence of the ushering in and rooting of Greek learning, knowledge, worldviews, and practices across all fronts and sectors of that

society resulted in haphazard, incremental, indirect and subtle forms of influence. The aforementioned “play” of the Bedouin cosmoses unfurled and unfolded in part concurrent with and in part after the Greco-Arabian revolution of mid-to-late ‘Abbāsīd culture and society. The love story of *Majnūn Laylā* functions as an important literary vehicle by and through which to witness this “play of the Bedouin cosmoses,” including their waxing and waning.

Three pivotal modes of reception characterize the way classical Islamic civilization imagined, managed, and made use of this Bedouin cosmos. All three highly instructive modes emerge in and through literary and historical analyses of the *Majnūn Laylā* story. First, one mode of engagement and reception permitted the ‘Abbāsīds to “know themselves” by looking into the mirror of this Bedouin cosmos – they accessed what may be termed the “memoria”²¹ pertaining to the foundational phase of Islam, which they examined and appropriated. Even more importantly, they sought to define themselves vis-à-vis this foundational “Islamic” *memoria* which for them also included the ‘Umayyad Islamic *memoria*,²² however problematic it was.

Second, given the stunningly multicultural and multi-religious cosmopolitan qualities of Baghdad during the height of the ‘Abbāsīd empire, this society utilized the Bedouin cosmos to create imaginative “safe spaces” within which to examine and work out its perceived fissures, fault lines, deficiencies, obsessions and collisions. As pointed out by one scholar, “[among the] founders of the contemporary study of religion, W. C. Smith, spoke of rare moments of interreligious creativity in world history that generated international communities of discourse. Baghdad in the ninth and tenth century was one, in which the Caliph al-Ma’mūn (who reigned from 813–833 CE) established a school for translation. The “Renaissance of Islam” saw the translation of Hippocrates, Galen, Plato, and Aristotle into Syriac and Arabic by Hunayn Ibn Ishāq and his disciples. The intellectual circles of tenth-century Baghdad were influenced by a wide variety of sects and schools: the orthodox Ash’arī theologians; the Mu’tazilī theologians-known as the “freethinkers of Islam,” who introduced the allegorical interpretation of Scripture; the Eastern Christian John of Damascus, who exerted a strong influence on Christian *kalām*; and a panoply of Christian sects, which were well represented, as were Zoroastrianism, Manicheanism, and Indian philosophy.”²³

The Muslim historian al-Hum’aydī records the experience of a Spanish theologian, Ibn Sa’dī, who visited Baghdad in the ninth century and attended an assembly of Islamic theology, *kalām*: “Yes, I attended twice, but I refused to go there for a third time . . . for this simple reason, which you will appreciate: At the first meeting there were present not only people of various Islamic sects, but also unbelievers, Magians, materialists, atheists, Jews and Christians, in short unbelievers of all kinds. . . . One of the unbelievers rose and said to the assembly: we are meeting here for a discussion. Its conditions are known to all. You, Muslims, are not allowed to argue from your books and prophetic traditions since we deny both. Everybody, therefore, has to limit

himself to rational arguments. The whole assembly applauded these words.” “So you can imagine,” Ibn Sa‘dī concluded, “that after these words I decided to withdraw.”²⁴

Many such “safe spaces” peopled by diverse Islamic and non-Islamic groups and sects, including “unbelievers,” were acutely needed and created in ‘Abbāsīd Baghdad. The reception and performances of literatures like the *Majnūn Laylā* romance carved out the kinds of imaginative space needed in order to interrogate, exhibit, examine, test, and formulate what the ‘Abbāsīd urbanites of Baghdad and beyond could not so easily execute in their own contemporaneous, urbane contexts. The love story of *Majnūn Laylā* offers a window into the use of the Bedouin cosmos as just such a safe space.

Third, the waxing and waning cycles of the Bedouin cosmos bespoke the reactions and counter-reactions to the unfolding Greco-Arabian paradigm-shift throughout nearly the entire time period of ‘Abbāsīd reign (including that of the Būyid rule). But, as L. E. Goodman points out, “the ‘reaction’ was in fact but one aspect of the increasingly complex manifestations of that very interaction.”²⁵ Both during and after the Greco-Arabian encounter, one can witness especially powerful examples of this at time simultaneous waning and waxing. The broad cultural cosmopolitanization of Greek ideas and worldviews functioned to provoke a counter-reaction in which, paradoxically, this Bedouin cosmos waxed just as it was waning. Again, an interpretation of the *Majnūn Laylā* romance in conjunction with the historical timeline pertaining to the Greco-Arabian translation movements presents a compelling glimpse into this waning and waxing of the Bedouin cosmos.

Late antiquity and the Greco-Arabian/Greco-Persian revolution

Over the period of two-hundred and fifty years (from circa the Common Era eighth to the tenth centuries or from Islamic calendar second to the fourth centuries), there unfolded a multi-pronged and multi-tiered deep transformation within the ‘Abbāsīd capital of Baghdad that ushered in and rooted Greek learning, knowledge, worldviews, and practices across all fronts and sectors of society. The Greco-Arabian translation movement initiated nothing short of a social, cultural and intellectual revolution. It profoundly altered ‘Abbāsīd Baghdadi society and beyond. As Dimitri Gutas describes it, it constituted a paradigm shift:

The Graeco-Arabic translation movement lasted, first of all, well over two-and-half centuries; it was no ephemeral phenomenon. In Baghdad, this project of translations was supported by the entire elite of ‘Abbāsīd society: caliphs and princes, civil servants and military leaders, merchants and bankers, and scholars and scientists; it was not the pet project of any particular group in the furtherance of their restricted agenda. Third, in Baghdad specifically, it was subsidized by an enormous outlay of funds, both public and private; it was no eccentric whim of a Maecenas or the fashionable affectation of a

few wealthy patrons seeking to invest in a philanthropic or self-aggrandizing cause. Finally, it was eventually conducted with rigorous scholarly methodology and strict philological exactitude – by the famous Hunayn ibn-Ishāq and his associates – on the basis of a sustained program that spanned generations and which reflects, in the final analysis, a social attitude and the public culture of early ‘Abbāsid society; it was not the result of the haphazard and random research interests of a few eccentric individuals who, in any age or time, might indulge in arcane philological and textual pursuits that in historical terms are proven irrelevant.²⁶

To sum up, in “the first two centuries of the ‘Abbāsid dynasty, which ruled from 132/749 (sometimes in name only), translations into Arabic blossomed in the new capital, Baghdad.”²⁷

No doubt, historically pre-Islamic Arabia itself “was never hermetically sealed” – indeed, “the Lakhmid vassals of Sassanid Persia and the Ghassanid vassals of Byzantium were subject to considerable Greek influence, not only through the Hellenized successor states to which they owed allegiance, but also through the sectarian Christians who had taken refuge among them from Byzantine authority.”²⁸ Hence, traces of “Greco-Roman enculturation” are found in pre-Islamic poetry and the Islamic scripture, i.e., the Qur’ān.²⁹ Moreover, “as a scholarly and scientific centre, Alexandria eclipsed Athens for centuries before the [seventh-century Islamic] *hijrah* and even in philosophy, this great Hellenistic centre was a serious rival to Athens. The cumulative effect of the work of Aristobulus (181–46 BC), Philo (25 BC–45 AD), Origen (185–253 AD), Plotinus (205–70), and many others was to shift the axis of Greek philosophy into a plane to some extent compatible with monotheist assumptions and scriptural religion.”³⁰

However, the first profound and sustained encounter of the Arabs with Greek modes of knowledge and learning occurred after the conquest of Syria (14/635). Unified by the monotheism of Islam, the Umayyads expanded beyond the boundaries of the Arabian peninsula to overtake and confront a world which had long been subject to Hellenizing influence,³¹ wherein the Umayyad caliphs established their new capital, Damascus (41/661) and in Damascus:

The cultivated milieus of Syrian Christianity were acquainted with Greek philosophy and medicine: well before the rise of Islam the Christians of Syria had already moved from antagonism to Greek culture to assimilation of it. Following the lead of the philosophical school of Alexandria, where he had been educated, Sergius of Resh‘aynā (d. 536 C.E.) set for himself the task of making Aristotle’s logic available to his own language community.

(Hugonnard-Roche, *La Logique*)³²

Hence, it was under the patronage of the Umayyad caliphs that this initial launch of the Greco-Arabian translation movement and activity occurred.

Yet it was under the imperial reign of the early ‘Abbāsids, “who regarded the achievement of a certain form of cultural integration under their Islamic banner

as a central mission of the[ir] dynasty,” that there occurred a maturation of the cosmopolitan character of the cultural and intellectual movements and shifts that fostered and appropriated knowledge of Greek arts and sciences.³³ During the first two centuries of ‘Abbāsīd rule, “an impressive number of philosophical and scientific works were translated, either directly from Greek or via Syriac intermediaries of the original works.”³⁴ After the Umayyad caliphs initiated this translation activity, the Greco-Arabian florescence in Baghdad received patronage from a number of constituencies, including the first several ‘Abbāsīd caliphs. “The Greek works to be translated came from various places, not only in the narrow sense of the provenance of the manuscripts, but also in the broader sense of the traditions of learning that, at the end of antiquity, organized the systems of higher education in the Greco-Roman world. One pathway of transmission was identified as extending “from Alexandria to Baghdad” by the German Orientalist Max Meyerhof, on the basis of an account by al-Fārābī (d. 339/950–1), also recorded by the historian al-Mas‘ūdī and two physicians.”³⁵ Suffice it to note that the ‘Abbāsīd Greco-Arabian transcultural and translation movement embraced the diverse and intersecting intellectual disciplines and knowledge fields of philosophy in all its branches, as well as astronomy, mathematics and optics, medicine, and then beyond this, the encyclopedic sciences including, alchemy, physiognomy, and magic at that time period.³⁶ It initiated a revolution that profoundly altered ‘Abbāsīd Baghdadi society in all of its permutations and strata.

Again, I stress that what must be kept in mind is that what filtered in from the Greek humanist and literary canons (in their translated forms and permutations) calibrated ‘Abbāsīd Islamic male identities, and more specifically, the ‘Abbāsīd male (re)construction and reception of the *Majnūn Laylā* story in ways that were elliptical, incremental and spontaneous. What I identify and analyze as the modes of “cultural primitivism” in the story index this kind of pivotal calibration. L. E. Goodman observation is relevant here: “Beyond the Greek arts and sciences, in poetry, history, fiction and drama, the Greek materials enter more haphazardly. The influences become more complex and subtle than in technical and scientific fields. Not that Arabic [Muslim] writers were incapable, but because the works, even if translated, were of indirect application to the concrete problems Arabic writers confronted. As the content of Islam gradually defined itself, there was a reaction as well as selection. But by the time it was possible to clearly discern the underlying premises of Greek thought and contrast them with a coherent body of Islamic ideas, the movement was completed and the mark had been made: what had been sought in the Greek canon had been made over to Arabic, and what was assimilable – not without struggle, but all the more decisively for that – had become constitutive in the new Islamic identity.”³⁷

‘Abbāsīd cultural primitivism and “the Bedouin”

A largely unexamined component in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance is its “cultural primitivism.”³⁸ Many critics, including, for example, Michael Dols, Julie Meisami, André Miquel and Jean-Claude Vadet, have pointed out the existence of

this component but it has not, to my knowledge, been subjected to appropriate scrutiny. It has not been analyzed within the context of the Greco-Arabian revolution and its impact. Michael Dols notes that Julie Meisami has briefly discussed “the cultural primitivism generated by nostalgia for desert life which was an important formative factor in ‘Abbāsīd literature.”³⁹ The term “primitivism” embraces a double concept, according to Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas in their monumental *A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Idea*. Both “chronological primitivism”⁴⁰ and “cultural primitivism” hark back to objectify a past era through somewhat paradoxical modes that render it both exotically primitive and primitively romantic.⁴¹ One way to define the second category of “cultural primitivism” is that it consists of “a type of urban-based discontent with the complexities of civilization.”⁴² Lovejoy and Boas make the assertion that it constitutes a “belief of . . . [people] living in a relatively highly evolved and complex cultural condition that a life far simpler and less sophisticated in some or in all respects is a more desirable life,”⁴³ but this definition does not quite do justice to the complexities of the concept since, first, it is not so much an idea as a multi-dimensional process and, second, nostalgia and longing are not without certain ludic aspects. In the ‘Abbāsīd context, for example, as concerns the people living in the cosmopolitan, Greco-Arabian metropolis of Baghdad as the capital of the ‘Abbāsīd empire, this process embraced the entertainingly ironic yet playful notion that “the simpler and less sophisticated life of the Arab Bedouin in the desert . . . [was] in some or all respects . . . a more desirable life.” What the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* demonstrates, however, is that it is not always just about the Bedouin past representing a “more desirable life,” but rather a deep fascination with that “cultural difference” – a fascination which includes rendering this “simpler past exotic, cruder, and entertainingly strange.”⁴⁴

The core literary construct central to these processes of “cultural primitivism” (when the Bedouin past suddenly became an object of entertainment and fascination) is the “creation of the motif of the romanticized Bedouin.” Beatrice Greundler speaks of this pivotal literary construct when she posits “the romanticization of the Bedouin, a literary creation of that [‘Abbāsīd] urban period,” in an essay in *Representations of Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature*.⁴⁵ She makes this insightful remark in the context of observations regarding an interrelated motif, namely the classical Arabic literary motif of *ḥanīn ilā ‘l-awṭān* or “nostalgic longing, yearning for the homeland,” which she maintains coincided with that of the “literary creation of the romanticized Bedouin.” Already in the late eighth-century (775–785 CE, under the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Mahdī), the idea of the “romanticized Bedouin” had presumably become current as illustrated in the famous example depicting “this caliph al-Mahdī stopp[ing] his retinue on a journey to have a lizard caught on the roadside, to be roasted and eaten on the spot Bedouin style.”⁴⁶

This ‘Abbāsīd-inflected literary motif and construct of the “romanticized Arab Bedouin” established itself and matured during the Greco-Arabian transformation and its aftermath. Complex modes of constructing especially a “Bedouin cultural past” and those who “inhabited” this past are at play herein. What the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* demonstrates is that it is not always just about the Bedouin past

representing a “more desirable life,” but rather a deep fascination with that “cultural difference,” which includes rendering this “simpler past exotic, cruder, and entertainingly strange. Such processes of primitivizing embrace the modalities of romanticizing and rendering exotic the “desert, natural, nomadic landscape” – but also concomitant with this, that of rendering inferior and child-like the Arab Bedouin character or figure.

Basically, the ‘Abbāsīd empire’s fashioning of this character-type distills three predominant traits: Arabic or Arab; nomadic or of the desert; and “rustically pure” and/or “playfully wily or wise” with the latter also at times polemically shading into the “pagan” and “irreligious.” By implication, through processes of alterity, again, this character-type is rendered both strangely exotic and/or disturbingly foreign. In ‘Abbāsīd sources, including in the tenth-century romance of *Majnūn Laylā*, such a character type is often simply labeled as an “Arab” or ‘*arabīyyun*. Cultural primitivist romanticizing constructions of Majnūn as the Bedouin Arab *par excellence* can be identified and characterized through a number of oppositions, all of which are discernable within the *Majnūn Laylā* romance: nomadic vs. urbanite, Bedouin pastoral vs. urban milieus, wild vs. civilized, pagan vs. Muslim scripturalism, decentralized tribes vs. empire state, Arab vs. Persian. Each of these polarities can be assimilated within the others to a greater or lesser degree. These ‘Abbāsīd-era constructs of polarities can be discerned and accessed through reliance on both the text and context of the story, including its modes of reception, performance and external historical data as well.

The ‘Abbāsīd imperial empire’s fashioning of this character type in terms of the three aforementioned traits (i.e., Arab, of the desert; and rustically pure and/or wily) is powerfully demonstrated in the following example from an ‘Abbāsīd-era source (it must be underscored that it is an ‘Abbāsīd-era text):

“a request to return home by the poet al-Nābigha al-Ja’dī (d.c. 63/683) [was submitted] to Caliph ‘Uthmān (d. 35/655) [which was] met with the disappointing counter-question, “A return to the desert (*ta’arrub*) after emigration, Abū Laylā? Don’t you know that this is frowned upon?”⁴⁷

A number of things stand out here: one, this Arab Bedouin poet, al-Nābigha (with the nickname, Abū Laylā) is shown submitting his request to the Caliph ‘Uthmān out of a nostalgic desire to return to his desert homeland; two, so quintessentially and romantically Bedouin is this theme of the “yearning to return to desert homeland” that there literally exists a verb that approximates the meanings for this, *ta’arrub* (the root of which is related to the word ‘*arab*’); and three, such a yearning is glossed as something a tad too pagan or polytheistic because, as the Caliph Uthmān is shown implying, it undercut a foundational moment in the biography of the prophet Muhammad, namely the time of the “emigration” or *hijra* of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina which, according to dominant narratives, launched the new, urban Islamic community in that city, i.e., Medina. This reference to the sacred event of the *hijra* or “emigration” immediately and

emphatically underscores the accrual of conflicting and charged religio-cultural facets to the centuries-later 'Abbāsīd construct of the Arab nomadic Bedouin.

As I suggested earlier, "the romanticization of the Bedouin, a literary creation of that ['Abbāsīd] urban period," is related to another early Arabic literary motif, namely that of *ḥanīn ilā al-waṭān*⁴⁸ or "nostalgic longing, yearning for the homeland." In our Arabic text of *Majnūn Laylā*, "cultural primitivism" also functions through this motif. No doubt actual, historical Bedouins felt longing and yearning for their homelands, but – in part due to this, and in part due to the disappearance of the "Bedouin cosmos" – this experience developed into a motif and construct. In actuality, during and after the wave of military conquests, with the rise and establishment (beginning in mainly the eighth century and thereafter) of large Islamic dynasty-based capitals with intimate cosmopolitan histories tied to Late Antiquity (i.e. Damascus and Baghdad), a Bedouin dispersion and displacement consequentially took place. Many Bedouins served in the Muslim armies.⁴⁹ "Their worldview, linked with that of the simpler, nomadic desert Arabs of Mecca and Medina, began to be eclipsed especially given their dispersions and displacements which were happening along with the founding of new Islamic heartlands. Hence, these affective modes of nostalgia and longing had a historical basis."⁵⁰ But the 'Abbāsīd construct and its attendant motif grew to maturation in the wake of the cultural impact of the Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian revolution of ideas that hastened the disappearance of this "Bedouin cosmos." Beatrice Greundler offers the following observations regarding the differences between the Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd aspects of the *ḥanīn ilā al-waṭān* motif:

In the Umayyad period, *ḥanīn* broadened to include cities: the yearning for Mecca by Medinans, for other cities by conquering and colonizing troops or by the 'Abbāsīd era settlers of Khurasan. Basra, for instance, is praised as the Muslims' and Arabs' new home. The settlers of the garrison towns felt a nostalgia of second degree for their acquired homes. Only in the 'Abbāsīd period was *ḥanīn* widened to refer to a whole region. This coincided with the romanticization of the Bedouin, a literary creation of that urban period.⁵¹

Significantly, in urban, cosmopolitan Baghdad, as suggested earlier, historically there occurs a dovetailing of two phenomena: the cultural impact of the Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian revolution of ideas and the full-blown maturation of what Greundler identifies as the literary motif of the "romanticized/exoticized Bedouin."

I draw attention to the Persian dimensions because the processes of alterity by which the Bedouin character-type is rendered foreign, exotic and crude strongly imply a Persian subtext. That is, the development of the literary motif and construct of the "romanticized/exoticized Arab Bedouin" is both Greco-Persian and Greco-Arabian. Given the Persian cultural and historical dimensions of 'Abbāsīd reign and society, the Perso-Sassanian history of Baghdad and 'Abbāsīds in general, as well as the tensions between Persian and Arab groups (exemplified in the

Shu'ūbīyya movement – an early 'Abbāsīd-era movement launched by non-Arab, Persian Muslims that resisted the ongoing economic and social privileging of Arab elites), the 'Abbāsīd Persianized urbanite masculinities of Baghdad skewed the literary construct of “the romanticization of the Bedouin” in a particular way. As seen through the eyes of Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian circles in Baghdad, the Bedouin was pristinely “pure” and somewhat uncouth, akin to a country bumpkin. In addition, this formulation of the exotified “Arab Bedouin” facilitated the kinds of imaginative space needed in order to interrogate, exhibit, examine and test ethnic, cultural and religious fault lines and fissures. The Greco-Persian avant garde movements and masculine fashions in the capital also added their inflections to the literary construct of the “romanticized/exoticized Arab Bedouin.”

The “genteel savants” invoked earlier in this introduction were part of the Greco-Persian and Greco-Arabian *ẓarīf* society or elegant, fashionable cliques that took the famous ninth century love treatise *Book of the Flower* (*Kitāb al-Zahrā*) as a core manual of their subculture. The treatise was composed by the belles-lettrist theologian and poet Ibn Dawūd and it imported certain aspects of the Greek wisdom traditions. Indeed, eight chapter headings in the form of maxims from this love treatise were inscribed in signet rings often worn by these elegant and fashionable cliques, including: “He who is elegant and refined is also chaste.” “When Greek science became widespread in Baghdad, it apparently became fashionable to ascribe [these sayings] to ancient Greek authorities; others were, indeed, translated from the Greek,” writes Willem Raven, who suggests that the “very idea of engraving them in signet rings” was, most likely, in and of itself, a Byzantine cultural importation.⁵²

One of the primary goals of this book is to shed light upon the mechanisms of the ideological work that the *Majnūn Laylā* story performed for 'Abbāsīd urbanite imperial audiences in the wake of the disappearance of the “Bedouin cosmos.” It focuses upon the processes of primitivizing Majnūn in the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* as part of the paradigm shift that occurred in the 'Abbāsīd empire after the Greco-Arabian intellectual revolution. Moreover, I attempt to demonstrate how gender and sexuality are employed in the processes of primitivizing Majnūn as markers of “strangeness” and “foreignness” in the 'Abbāsīd interrogations of the multiple categories of ethnicity, culture, identity, religion, and language present in their cosmopolitan milieus. Such cultural work is performed through the ideological uses of the mechanisms of alterity that create temporal and spatial distancing and affective nearness. The tree-man motif that I highlight in the first several paragraphs of this Introduction (the Majnūn who lived among trees and with wild desert animals after losing his beloved due to indiscretions in his poetry) functions as one of many markers of the “exoticness” and “foreignness” – which is to say: the alterity – of Majnūn. This motif conveys the disappearance and reappearance of the quintessential “romanticized, exoticized Bedouin” and its parallels with that of the disappearing, reappearing “Bedouin cosmos.” The tree-man is a curious and highly significant detail mentioned in the tenth-century Arabic rendition of *Majnūn Laylā* that, as far as I know, has been overlooked by critics and scholars studying this story. In an account associated with an Umayyad-era imperial

tax-collector named Nawfal b. Musāhiq, one finds the following passage toward the end of the story:

Nawfal said: I came to the desert [*bādiya*] and asked about him, [and] it was said to me: He [Majnūn] went wild and we do not know of him or where he went. So, one day, I went out to hunt, and with me was a group from my companions. I [arrived] in a shrine-like area and we reached a great big tree and by it was a herd of deer, and through the gaps of the tree could be seen a person [perched]. My companions marveled at that, so I came to him and knew it was [the] Majnūn of whom I had been informed.⁵³

Of what significance is this anecdote? What does it mean? Why does it surface in a tenth-century 'Abbāsīd romance? A millennium separates this rendering of Majnūn-as-tree-man and the character of the tree-man in Italo Calvino's 1957 novel *The Baron of the Trees*, although the pre-modern romance and the modern novel comment upon similar themes: how jaded urbanites and inheritors of Antiquity set forth the themes of romanticizing solitude in nature and the "distance" from society needed by the creative artist through the inscription of cultural primitivism.

Gender and sexuality in the processes of cultural primitivism

Gender and sexuality are crucially in two implicated in the twin 'Abbāsīd urban period constructs of the "Bedouin cosmos" and "the romanticization of the Bedouin." Their important uses delineate certain crucial aspects of identity formation of Arabo-Islamic imperial culture and society. As Nadia El Cheikh insightfully observes: "Women and men, gender relations, and sexuality are at the heart of the cultural construction of identity, as they are discursively used to fix moral boundaries and consolidate particularities and differences."⁵⁴ My overarching argument regarding the Arabic *Majnūn Laylā* thus partly echoes that made by El Cheikh in her book *Islam, 'Abbāsīd Identity and Women*:

The 'Abbāsīds were struggling with the complexities of self-definition across their own internal linguistic, sociocultural, and religious models of identity. The sexualization of cultural difference and the ways in which the gender constructs of the dominant imperial culture were used to explain the "uncivilized" nature of other groups⁵⁵

becomes El Cheik's signatory theme. 'Abbāsīd imperial interrogations of the multiple categories of ethnicity, culture, identity, religion and language in the cosmopolitan capital of Baghdad were performed in and through assessments and reassessments of women and men, gender relations, and sexuality.

As regards the *Aghānī* rendition of *Majnūn Laylā*, the semi-fictional Bedouin-like qualities of its main character Majnūn are exaggerated through the lenses of gender and sexuality just enough to caricature him (i.e., to render him both

familiar and unfamiliar) for the relevant ‘Abbāsīd audiences. These gendered traits or qualities include, for instance, rendering Majnūn child-like, primitive and irrational by depicting his teenage obsession with the beloved Laylā, his recurrent fainting spells, swooning and weeping, as well as his sentimental recollections of his childhood with Laylā and his erratic roaming and wandering toward the Najd (childhood site of his meeting the beloved). Hence, for the Greco-Persian and Greco-Arabian elite and courtly ‘Abbāsīd audiences of the time, Majnūn’s primitivist eccentricities become an object of entertainment even while reifying the self-definitions of Baghdadi sophisticates as an urbanized, cosmopolitan, intellectual gifted culture (i.e., the legacy-bearers of Greco-Hellenism). Majnūn’s longings for the past allow them to rehearse their own forms of nostalgia for a simpler, more natural, pre-Empire Bedouin place and time.

El Cheikh has remarked that the ‘Abbāsīd’s “confrontation with *jāhilīyya* and with *jāhilīyya*’s many later incarnations was crucial for the mainstream Islamic cultural construction of itself as a religious and imperial center. The texts’ formulation of *jāhilīyya* was part of a cultural reorientation that took place over the course of two centuries with the aim of defining ever more sharply what it meant to be an Arab and a Muslim.”⁵⁶ This confrontation with *jāhilīyya* and the ensuing cultural reorientation cannot be comprehended without taking into account the Greco-Arabian intellectual revolution and its manifest impact especially during the eighth to the tenth centuries. In other words, the texts’ re-formulation of *jāhilīyya*, as charted by El Cheikh, is unfolded in and through the profound paradigm shift that occurred in the ‘Abbāsīd imagination after the enormous impact of the Greco-Arabian translation projects (which is to say: just as the “Bedouin cosmos” was disappearing). A paradigm shift that called for an ironic distancing reformulation vis-à-vis the past or *jāhilīyya* – a distancing reformulation that mitigated the prevailing propensities of the age to idealize or demonize the *jāhilīyya* and, with it, the Umayyad *memorium*. El Cheikh further notes that a distinct threat of recursion nevertheless remained: “The danger of relapsing into the ways of *jāhilīyya* would persist through individuals or groups whose alternative beliefs and behavior would pose a challenge to the integrity and character of the Muslims, both in their formative stages and in the model on which classical Islam would ultimately base itself – that is, an established creed and a fixed set of rituals initiated by Muhammad, distinct from those of the polytheists and the other monotheists.”⁵⁷ Could such “relapses” be viewed within the context of the cycles of the waxing and waning of the “Bedouin cosmos”? In the wake of the Greco-Arabian revolution, such cycles expressed the conflicting ways in which the *jāhilīyya* and the “Bedouin cosmos” continued to intersect and come into conflict with diverse intellectual and religious constituencies and cliques. An index of these cycles is found in the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*.

Paradoxically, then, there exists, in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance a tragic, romanticizing mode (stemming from Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian ‘Abbāsīd sensibilities and contexts) which constructs the old nomadic Bedouin order as somehow “primitively ideal,” “wonderfully strange” and “innocent” in contrast with the new Empire-based *Weltanschauung* associated with ‘Abbāsīd urban imperial centers

after the Greco-Arabian revolution. In discussing the “sacrificial crisis” of Greek tragedy, René Girard notes that “we always view the ‘tragic flaw’ from the perspective of the new, emergent order; never from that of the old order in the final stages of decay.” The *Majnūn Laylā* is a tragic work that rises up primarily from the perspective of the “new emergent [‘Abbāsīd] order” that experienced loss resulting from profound paradigm shift and transformation, rather than from the vantage point of “the old order” already in a state of disintegration.”⁵⁸

This book analyzes the pivotal hermeneutical trajectories found in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance. First, ‘Abbāsīd Muslim Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian identities and their memory-construction of and relation to the past (Bedouin, Umayyad, etc.), mainly through processes of primitivism and alterity. Second, it examines the ways in which gender and sexuality, as well as exotifications of masculinities and femininities (e.g., eroticized love triangles), are employed in the processes of alterity and primitivism. The intermix of both of these agendas pave the way for understanding the rich meanings of the development and performances of the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* in the contexts at hand.

Theories and methods

Genre dimensions of the *Majnūn Laylā* story are an important element in my approaches to this book. Paul Strohm suggests that genres can be regarded as “mutable concepts, subject to cultural and historical variables” that allow us “to use them heuristically as an aid to understanding similarities and differences in literary works.”⁵⁹ Understood primarily as a heuristic device, genre has played a significant role in my analysis of *Majnūn Laylā*. Genre criticism concerned with Western literatures, as well as comparative genre approaches used by critics of Middle Eastern literatures, have provided me with guideposts without which I perhaps would not have investigated certain features of this story. Throughout my research and writing, the shuttling back and forth between the early Arabic and European contexts has been a dialogic process, sometimes inspired and mandated by the exigencies of my own text(s) and at other times instigated by discoveries made by critics studying European material or Middle Eastern material in a comparative fashion, discoveries that resonated richly with the content of my own material.⁶⁰

Moreover, given the universality of both the human phenomenon of love and the topic of love in world literatures from time immemorial, it seems imprudent to sever examination of the ‘Uḡhrī love literature in the Arabic context from how it has been studied within interrelated, resonant, pre-modern cultural traditions, e.g., Greek, Jewish and European. Indeed, the assumption that somehow things “Arabic” or “Middle Eastern” or “Islamic” (terms often used interchangeably in an uncritical fashion) are somewhat unique, *sui generis*, exotically different, and must be studied apart from Western cultures of late antiquity, or from Western cultural and literary traditions, bears an orientalist or neo-orientalist tinge – especially given the profound historical and cultural interconnections between what we may simply gloss as the West and the Islamic world of late antiquity. Lastly, gender

constructs are at the heart of these Arabic love stories and, arguably, both in terms of theory and methods, Western scholarship, especially in the last sixty years, has provided a wealth of information.

My analysis of *Majnūn Laylā* hinges generally on several literary theories regarding the genre of romance.⁶¹ Such theoretically oriented genre definitions of romance provided by contemporary Western critics are very useful for understanding the romance genre irrespective of time or place. These theoretical genre paradigms do what theory is supposed to do: offer explanatory power for the formulation or model that is applicable to various kinds of cultural or literary data. First, my approach to *Majnūn Laylā* as a romance supports Susan Crane's observation that romance is "the medieval genre in which virginity, courtship, marriage, lineal concerns, primogeniture, and sexual maturation are most fully at issue."⁶² Second, I pay attention to Patricia Parker's definition of "'romance' as primarily a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective or object."⁶³ The literary critic Northrop Frye describes this questing as "the endless adventures and endless sexual stimulation of the wandering of desire" in romance.⁶⁴

Given its attention to the myriad constructs of masculinities and femininities within it, gender is integral to my analysis of *Majnūn Laylā* as a romance. Sexuality provides another extremely rich area of investigation in the Arabic *Majnūn Laylā* partly because, according to both popular and scholarly views, most critics and readers deem this romance to be a "chaste" love story in which sexual union is absent and marriage is thwarted. Sexuality may be broadly understood in two inter-related ways: (1) in Susan Crane's words, as "the generation, expression, and organization of [individual] desire,"⁶⁵ as well as (2) a social and cultural construct in systems of courtship and conjugality. Conceptually, I am concerned with the following: how gender relates to sexuality and vice versa; how virginity, courtship, and marriage rituals are represented; how this story constructs and construes masculinity and femininity, especially within different periodicities; and how male homosocial bonds intersect with other aspects of the story. Throughout, I pay attention to how various types of desire – heterosexual and homosocial – are created, represented, and received in this romance.

Methodologically, I have relied on a structuralist approach that identifies and analyzes a "system of relations and oppositions" in the *Majnūn Laylā*'s interconnecting rhetorical, syntactic, and semantic levels.⁶⁶ I analyze the exchanges, substitutions, inconsistencies, repetitions, omissions, and underlying patterns in these multiple levels. Substitutions, repetitions, and/or inconsistencies in the verbal texture of the romance were important in uncovering key primitivist (as well as other) motifs. Attention to the rhetorical and verbal texture of the story, for example – to its code words and phrases, and their etymological and lexical dimensions – has been a part of the methodology employed. Along with diachronic frameworks, I treat the *Aghānī* version of *Majnūn Laylā* synchronically and analyze it in terms of its literary components: rhetorical and stylistic aspects; motifs and themes (e.g., gender paradigms, sacrifice, go-between, intermediaries and triangle); modes and genre strains (e.g., tragic and pastoral modes) that transcend its immediate milieu.

The text's frequent use of the Arabic word for "to roam" (hāma) and its derivatives, for instance, alerted me to the rich polysemy of the motif of wandering in the story.⁶⁷ This discovery, combined with a recognition of the parallel importance of wandering, or errancy, in European medieval romance led me to use some of Patricia Parker's formulations in the *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (1979). René Girard's works, including *Violence and the Sacred*, and Eve K. Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* have been helpful in discerning the structural patterns in the romance, such as the existence of triangulations and the organization of sexuality in these triangles. An analysis of these triangulations was instrumental in throwing into sharp relief the way in which – according to 'Abbāsī readings of alterity and its processes of primitivizing and exotification of the 'Uḏhrī models of femininity and masculinity – the beloved always gets married to a third party. This analysis further shed light on the paradoxes associated with the motifs of virginity and chastity in the romance.

Ultimately, however, the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* displays the literary conventions and genre traits germane to the oral and textual traditions of Arabic literature. It consists of about ninety pages of prose material interspersed with an abundant quantity of poetry. Thus the Arabic story itself is not presented as a coherent narrative or even a narrative but rather as a chain of conflicting and overlapping *akhbār* – i.e., anecdotal prose units of varying length termed *khavar* (plural, *akhbār*) that itemize the names of their oral transmitters. The Arabic prose units are arranged to form multiple story cycles. The oral transmission of the story raises the matter of the historically arbitrary nature of the links between its narrative units (*akhbār*) and verses of poetry. Since the poetry and prose constituting *Majnūn Laya* in the *Aghānī* are based on a long-standing prior oral tradition, as Michael Zwettler has argued in his landmark work on the subject of orality and early Arabic poetry, the verses "cannot be accounted a stable or intrinsic element of any but a very few such narratives."⁶⁸ However, the matter of the historically arbitrary nature of the links between the narrative units (*akhbār*) and verses of poetry allows for techniques that examine reader reception. That is, at times the prose functions as commentary and interpretation concerning the poems. An example from the romance will serve to elucidate my description:

Ibn al-Marzubanī informed us, he said: al-Qahdhamī said: When al-Majnūn said:

God decreed her to one other than me and afflicted me with her love
Why was I not afflicted with a thing other than Laylā?

. . . He lost his mind. The song is for Hakam. . . . And Jahdha informed me of this tradition from Maymun bin Harūn that when he recited this line, he became a leper.⁶⁹

The verses are accompanied by a prose snippet (a very brief prose unit called a *khavar*) regarding Majnūn's loss of mind that emphatically comments upon and

interprets aspects of the poem and the persona of Majnūn. In this way the modes of the romance's reader reception are embedded within the text of the romance.

Even while it falls within the genre of romance, *Majnūn Laylā* contains diverse intersecting and encompassing modal elements: pastoral, ironic, lyrical, didactic, satirical, tragic. In other words, genres may be distinguished from generic modes. The genre is romance. But the generic modes are many and as divergent as tragic, pastoral, didactic, dramatic and lyrical. Alastair Fowler's observations in *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* and those of Paul Strohm in "Storie, Spelle, Geste, Romaunce, Tragedie: Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy Narratives" are highly relevant. Fowler points out that "[m]odal terms tend to be adjectival" and, because "they are less historically circumscribed, modes seem to be 'distillations' of a [generic] kind's features."⁷⁰ Fowler has argued that genres are much more like families than classes. These formulations combined with insights from Northrop Frye's analyses of genre in *Anatomy of Criticism* and *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* have permitted me to attain a rich and nuanced perspective from which to understand the genre traits of my textual material.

That Northrop Frye's formulations on tragic *mythoi*, arising out of his study of Classical and Biblical sources, have relevance to the early Arabic sources under consideration is not surprising within the context of the overall arguments made in this book (and also, when one considers suggestions put forth by a previous generation of scholars regarding the possibility of Greek influences on early Arabic love poetry).⁷¹ By considering traditions of romance in literatures other than but contiguous with that of early Arabic literature, namely the Greco-Hellenistic and Persian, we see how polygenesis and remote influences might be at work in the 'Uḏhrī romances. Gustave von Grunebaum, who has addressed the issue of the influence of the Greek romance (100 BC–300 AD) on Arabic love poetry, describes the Hellenistic pattern as intricately constructed "around the basic scheme of accompanying a pair of beautiful and chaste lovers who are separated and tossed about by the whims of fate on their perilous wanderings until they are finally reunited in blissful happiness."⁷² Likewise, lovers in the classical Persian tradition of romance, according to William Hanaway, "have numerous meetings and separations and suffer the same wide swings of fortune that the Greek heroes do."⁷³ Hanaway maintains that there is direct evidence of the influence of Greek romances on the Persian romances, but von Grunebaum argues against positing any chronological lines of descent between the Greek romances and the Arabic ones, and instead maintains that the impact should be viewed in terms of "parallel influences."⁷⁴ Even if no direct connections are posited, exogamy or the influence of foreign models cannot be ruled out entirely, because Fowler maintains that genre codes often come to performers and writers randomly and indirectly rather than by chronologically linear means.⁷⁵

Notes

- 1 For the phrase "genteel savants," see how Michael Dols references two cultural cliques (primarily in Baghdad), one described as "genteel savants" and the other as "permissive

sufis”: “The intention of most of these writers was to define what was acceptable behavior according to scripture and to combat the perceived permissiveness of the sufis on the one hand and the genteel savants on the other hand,” Michael Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 314.

- 2 Willem Raven, *Ibn Dawud al-Isbahani and His Kitab al-Zahra* (Leiden: University of Leiden, dissertation, 1989), 70.
- 3 Al-Jāhiz, the famous ‘Abbāsīd theologian and essayist, gives an example of singing girls performing Majnūn’s poetry at a poetry reading and dance in Baghdad. Al-Jāhiz, *The Epistle on Singing-Girls of Jāhiz*, *Approaches to Arabic Literature*, No. 2, trans. and ed. A. F. L. Beeston (Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1980), 33:

When . . . [the singing girl] encounters [the lover’s name], she quotes Majnūn’s verse,

I love every name that is the same as hers, or like it, or in any way resembles it.

If anyone [in the audience] calls out the name, she quotes Majnūn’s other lines:

Often has someone called out, when we were on

Mina’s slopes, and has stirred unwittingly my heart’s griefs; he has called by the name of Laylā someone other than my love, and it was as though by [the very word] “Laylā” he caused a bird in my breast to fly up.

- 4 *Majnūn Laylā*, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, comp. Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, Vol. 2 (Cairo: Al-Hay’ah al-Misriyyah al-‘Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1992), 1–97. All verse (poetry) translations from *Kitāb al-Aghānī* are mine, unless otherwise noted, and are cited in the text by page number.
- 5 I deliberately invoke this term “queer” to mean both its earlier semantics (i.e., strange, weird, peculiar) and its contemporary semantics pertaining to the challenging of heteronormativities. Subjecting *Majnūn Laylā* and Majnūn to queer hermeneutics still needs to be done. However, the queering of Majnūn is already found in some modern Middle Eastern sources. Cf. Tarek el-Ariss, “Majnun Strikes Back: Crossroads of Madness and Homosexuality in Modern Arabic Literature,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45 (2013): 293–312.
- 6 The term and/or concept *al-Jahilīyya* may be defined as follows: a normative, invented term by Muslims that they gradually constructed and that refers to the era immediately preceding the transformation brought about by the arrival of the “pure and monotheist” Islam; often glossed as the “pre-Islamic era of pagan ignorance and impetuosity”; spanning approximately 400–500 CE.
- 7 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third Edition, s.v. “Abu l-Faraj al-Isfahani,” by Sebastian Guenther, accessed May 20, 2019, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0105.
- 8 *Majnūn Laylā*, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, Vol. 2, first beginning on pg. 11; second beginning: pp. 12–13 and pp. 29–30; third beginning on pp. 44–45.
- 9 F. E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), xx–xxi.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 The term “cosmos” is generically defined as a “collection of images concerning the universe held in a religion or cultural tradition.” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Second Edition, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference, 2005).
- 12 “According to Qur’ān 33:20, they live in the *bādiya* – originally the land outside a main, usually walled, city, in this case most probably Yathrib/Medina – with a status subordinate to the Muslim community and bearing the obligation to take part in war. Not all inhabitants of the *bādiya* were thus necessarily ‘*rb*.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third Edition, s.v. “Arabs (historical),” by Jan Retsö, accessed May 20, 2019, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_22957 (2010).

- 13 Furthermore, “the pre-Islamic evidence does not support the idea that ‘Arab was a general designation for people living on the [Arabian] peninsula. Instead, Arabs appear as groups living among other groups. For example, they lived in ‘the area between the eastern Nile Delta, southern Palestine, and the Sinai Peninsula – which was ruled by the Arabs until 106 CE, when it was incorporated into the Roman imperial system as Provincia Arabia.’” Arabs are further documented in the Hellenistic and early Roman period in Ḥawrān (in present-day Syria and Jordan), the Bekaa Valley (al-Biq‘ā) of Lebanon, central and northern Syria (around al-Rīstān and Qinnasrīn), central Mesopotamia, and South Arabia.” Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Cf. the important discussions regarding this in Chase Robinson’s, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- 17 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third Edition, s.v. “Greek into Arabic,” by Cristina, D’Ancona, accessed January 1, 2019, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27523.
- 18 The prevailing negative and prejudicial constructs and images of the Umayyads, especially its rulers, in and during the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate and its societies. Cf. Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb, “Introduction: Toward A History of Umayyad Legacies,” in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2–3.
- 19 I would like to thank very much an anonymous Press reviewer for this particular phrasing.
- 20 Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs*, 27.
- 21 Cf. Chapter One. Again, I borrow this term and concept from the book by Antoine Borrut and Paul Cobb wherein they employ it to pose the crucial question: “How do we know what we think we know about the Umayyads? To answer that question requires a brief consideration of the history of Umayyad historical memory, one that includes how the Umayyads wanted to be remembered and how later generations shaped that memory for us (what we may, again following historians of memory, call *Umayyad memoria*).” Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb, “Introduction: Toward A History of Umayyad Legacies,” in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2–3.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Diana Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya Ibn Paquda’s Duties of the Heart* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), xii.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 L. E. Goodman, “The Translation of Greek Materials into Arabic,” *Religion, learning and science in the “Abbāsīd Period*, Cambridge History of Arabic Literature II, eds. M. J. L. Young, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 496.
- 26 Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Early ‘Abbāsīd Society, 2nd-4th/5th-10thc* (London: Routledge, 1998), 2.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Lenn Goodman, “The Greek Impact on Arabic Literature,” in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, Cambridge History of Arabic Literature I, eds. A. F. L. Beeston, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 460–462. Goodman notes that Jews and Christians were among the chief conveyors and bearers of Hellenistic culture in pre-Islamic Arabia. He also points out that the Ghassanid Monophysite princes were entertained by Greek singing girls – and yet they were subject to both non-secular and secular Greek influences on them. Ibid., 463.
- 29 D’Ancona, “Greek into Arabic.”
- 30 Goodman, “The Greek Impact on Arabic Literature,” 470.
- 31 Ibid., 460.
- 32 D’Ancona, “Greek into Arabic.”
- 33 Goodman, “The Greek Impact on Arabic Literature,” 478.

- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 D'Ancona, "Greek into Arabic."
- 37 Goodman, "The Greek Impact on Arabic Literature," 478.
- 38 The definitions to follow are from the early twentieth-century volume edited by Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas titled *A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas*. To probe what this phrase means, it is necessary to point out that it is, in part, dependent upon "the use of the term 'nature' to express the standard of human values, the identification of the good with that which is 'natural' or 'according to nature.' The primitive condition of mankind, or the life of 'savage' peoples, has usually been extolled because it has been supposed to constitute 'the state of nature. Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1935).
- 39 Julie Meisami, "Review: *Love, Madness, and Poetry: An Interpretation of the Macgnun Legend*, by As'ad E. Khairallah," *Edebiyat* 4, no. 2 (1979): 277–286.
- 40 Just to define the first concept: "Chronological primitivism is one of the many answers which may be and have been given to the question: What is the temporal distribution of good, or value, in the history of mankind, or, more generally, in the entire history of the world? It is, in short, a kind of philosophy of history, a theory, or a customary assumption, as to the time-past or present or future-at which the most excellent condition of human life, or the best state of the world in general, must be supposed to occur." George Sarton, "Review: *A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas, Volume I: Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, by Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas," *Isis* 25, no. 1 (May 1936): 169–172.
- 41 Sarton, "Review: *A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas*," 170. Sarton drawing upon A. O. Lovejoy here. Also cf. review by George R. Havens, "*Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* by Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas," *Modern Language Notes* 52, no. 6 (June 1937): 421–422.
- 42 Ibid., 171.
- 43 Ibid., Sarton directly quoting Lovejoy and Boas.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Beatrice Greundler, "*Al-Hanīn ilā l-Awtan* and Its Alternatives in Classical Arabic Literature," in *Representations of Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Sebastian Gunther and Stephan Milich (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag AG, 2016), 18.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid., 16–17.
- 48 Ibid., 18.
- 49 What this inaugurated is conveyed, albeit somewhat simply, through the following quotation: "Over several decades, the mental revolution inspired by Islam becomes ripe in the popular mentality; movements of population with the mass exodus of the Bedouin of Arabia and the establishment of a new landscape, the urban landscape, deal a heavy blow to ancient descriptive art. Certainly, 'Bedouinising' poets, much like the conservatism inherent in all poetic language, perpetuate the images of yesteryear, but this is merely a case of imitation imposed by a traditionalist attitude. The umbilical cord which used to link the public, the poet and descriptive thought together is henceforward severed, except with the *nasīb* and its descriptive extensions. The major victim seems to be the range of animals and birds, and, to a lesser degree, the desert and its thematic developments. The urban poets of Kūfa, al-Uḡayshir, Ḥunayn al-Ḥīrī, 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zabīr al-Asadī, Ismā'īl b. 'Ammār al-Asadī and 'Ammār Dhū Kināz, introduce images from the hybrid world of the taverns and courtesans of al-Ḥīra. The Ḥidjāzī school offers us a full-blown introduction to the domain of women of high society." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. "Waṣf," by A. Arazi and Y. Meron, accessed May 20, 2019, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1341.
- 50 It was through the poetry of the *ṣa'alik* or the "brigand poets" that the motif *hanīn ilā l-awtan* is articulated at this time: "These highway bandits, members of tribes which

maintained their Bedouin character, crowded the Pilgrimage routes. The poets among them, of whom there were many, advanced towards a three-fold description of the desert which they considered a *waṭan* or homeland, a refuge and a place of terror. They were full of nostalgia for their land. They never ceased painting the landscapes of their youth, with their infinite spaces, their caressing winds, and the breeze of early morning; but these are also the places where tents are buffeted by tempestuous and icy winds in the winter.” al-Kattāl al-Kilābī, *Dīwān* (Baghdād, 1968), 19–27, 33, 41, 45, 51, 68; Muḥammad ibn Yazīd Mubarrad, *Kitāb al-kāmil*, ed. William Wright (Leipzig: Kreysing, 1864), 290; ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Ḥalafī, *Uḍabā’ al-sudjūn* (Beirut, 1963), 42–4, 78–80, 92–93, 96–7, 99–102; ‘Abd al-Mu‘īn al-Mallūhī, *Ash‘ār al-luṣūṣ wa-akḥbāruhum* (Dimashq: Ṭalās, 1988), 20, 73. Ibid.

51 Greundler, “*Al-Hanīn ilā l-Awtan* and Its Alternatives,” 18.

52 Raven, *Ibn Dawūd al-Isbahani and Greek Wisdom*, 70.

53 Al-Iṣfahānī, “*Majnūn Laylā*,” 2:66.

54 Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Women, Islam and ‘Abbāsīd Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 3, 16.

55 Ibid., 16.

56 Ibid., 3.

57 Ibid.

58 Girard argues that the reason for this is that “modern thought” is unable to understand the significance of “the practice of sacrifice.” René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 43.

59 Paul Strohm, “Storie, Spelle, Geste, Romaunce, Tragedie: Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy Narratives,” *Speculum* 46 (1971): 385.

60 With the exception of a few works (Jean Claude Vadet, Andre Miquel), past and current approaches to the ‘Uḍhrī love literature have not capitalized upon Euro-Western theories and paradigms. Existing approaches rely mainly upon traditional philology and genre history and criticism confined to the early Arabic literary context. I too rely heavily upon philological methods and the relevant early Arabic literary history, but there are several reasons why an enlargement of the approaches is very beneficial.

61 Such theoretically oriented genre definitions of romance provided by contemporary Western critics are very useful for understanding the romance genre irrespective of time or place. These theoretical genre paradigms do what theory is supposed to do: offer explanatory power for the formulation or model that is applicable to various kinds of cultural or literary data.

62 Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4.

63 Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 4.

64 In a discussion of the genre, Frye quotes the following line from Ecclesiastes: “Better is the sight of the eye than the wandering of desire.” What is being condemned in this line is an insatiability of appetite, a state wherein being desirous or desiring is prolonged endlessly. Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture, a Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 30.

65 Crane, *Gender and Romance*, 4. Desire here may denote any of a variety of desires (e.g., heterosexual, homoerotic, homosocial).

66 Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 10–11, 13. Culler divides these relations and oppositions into three categories: (1) syntagmatic relations (2) paradigmatic relations, (3) binary oppositions. Regarding the three levels I mention, Todorov describes these as semantic (themes), syntactic (narrative structure), verbal (aspects of rhetoric). Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. R. Howard (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973). Peter Heath uses Todorov’s scheme in his article “Romance as Genre in ‘Thousand and One Nights’,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 18 (1987).

- 67 The locus classicus for this usage of the word is in the Qur'ān (26: 224–226).
- 68 Michael Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978), 205.
- 69 Al-Isfahānī, “*Majnūn Laylā*,” 2: 36.
- 70 Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 11.
- 71 However, as Roger Allen has shown, some medieval Arab critics, such as Diya al-Din b. al-Athar (d. 1239), vigorously denied the presence of Greek influences on the Arabic literary tradition. *The Arabic Literary Heritage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 641.
- 72 Gustave von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 305.
- 73 William Hanaway, *Love and War: Adventures from the “Fīruz Shāh Nāma” of Sheikh Bighami* (New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1974), 5.
- 74 Gustave von Grunebaum, “Greek Form Elements in the Arabian Nights,” *Journal of African and Oriental Studies* 62 (1942): 277–292.
- 75 Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, Ch. 9.

1 Song culture, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (book of songs) and the love story of *Majnūn Laylā*

The earliest *full* version of *Majnūn Laylā*¹ love story is found in the tenth-century multi-volume Arabic-language compendium titled *Kitāb al-Aghānī*² or *Book of Songs*. There is also a ninth-century rendition in a compendium called *Kitāb al-Shi'r wal Shu'arā* or *Book of Poetry and Poets* by the polymath and literary critic Ibn Qutayba³ who has about four or five pages of Arabic material on this love story. But the earliest, fullest Arabic version is in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* and it is the principal source that later renditions and versions of *Majnūn Laylā* drew upon. I frame my analysis upon and around the *Aghānī* rendition of the *Majnūn Laylā* romance in this book, though I also occasionally draw upon the much shorter ninth-century story.

On the authorship and composition of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, it is the magnum opus of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, a “celebrated man of letters, a historian with sociological interests, a musicologist, and a poet,”⁴ who was born in Baghdad (b. 897 CE) and undertook most of his education in Kufa and Baghdad. He received patronage from various sources, but primarily from the Būyid court. In addition to the *Aghānī*, al-Iṣfahānī also authored a historical work and books on genealogy as well as edited the *diwāns* (anthologies) of some noted poets.⁵ He died in Baghdad somewhat after 971 CE in ill health.⁶

Al-Iṣfahānī was one of the leading lights of the literary and artistic entourage patronized by the Būyid court. The Būyid court was dominated by a dynasty of Iranian and Persian background that politically usurped control amid the chaos of Baghdad in 945 CE. For a man like al-Iṣfahānī, who had been observing with horror and pain⁷ the repercussions of the fragmentation and breakdown in tenth-century ‘Abbāsid political authority in Baghdad, the establishment of Būyid rule in Baghdad was associated with the return of stability and added prosperity and he welcomed it. Al-Iṣfahānī led perhaps an uninhibited, rather unkempt “bohemian way of life,”⁸ yet, his eccentricities, as Hilary Kilpatrick has pointed out in her magisterial monograph on the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, were more than made up by “qualities such as wit, a sharp tongue and skill in satire, and gifts as a *raconteur* combined with vast culture and multifarious learning.”⁹ Kilpatrick also notes that al-Iṣfahānī “belonged to the Shi‘i tendency closest to the Sunnis.”¹⁰ It may be noted that al-Iṣfahānī belonged to the same Zaydiyya branch of Shi‘ism with which themselves Būyid rulers identified.

The Būyids (sometimes spelled as Buwahids) were originally from Daylam, an area of Iran (i.e., Daylam related to the “Dolomoties” a term used by Procopius, the historian who wrote about the wars of Justinian).¹¹ As for the ‘Abbāsīd court, during first two centuries (beginning 750 CE), it began acquiring texts in Greek medicine, philosophy, astronomy and other non-Qur’anic sciences, and thus, large, widely supported translation projects into Arabic blossomed in the new capital, Baghdad.¹² It seems that the Daylamis had remained largely autonomous during the Sassanian era and also during the first several centuries after the Islamic conquest of Iran. “But in the latter part of the ninth century and particularly at the beginning of the tenth, as a result of the missionary efforts of the Caspian Zaydī sayyids, with whom the Daylamites for most of the period were in alliance, Zaydī Shiism gained a strong foothold in Daylam.”¹³

Būyid ‘Abbāsīd memorialization and the commissioning of the Kitāb al-Aghānī

The production of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* or *Book of Songs*, a multi-volume compendium by al-Iṣfahānī, functioned to invoke and memorialize the golden era of the early ‘Abbāsīd caliphate during a time when the late ‘Abbāsīd caliphate was anything but that. Given the Persianized Iranian ethos of the Būyids, it is interesting to ponder the meanings of their investiture in the compilation of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* at that time. The project of writing the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* undertaken by al-Iṣfahānī at the Būyid court was preceded, as alluded to earlier, by a period of acute historical and political crisis. The decade preceding the Būyid seizure of power in the mid-tenth century witnessed a scene of complete chaos under the brief reigns of the original ‘Abbāsīd caliphate line (especially under the caliph al-Qāhir and less so under al-Rāḍī). As Nadia El Cheikh has noted: “The fourth/tenth century witnessed the beginning of the disintegration of the ‘Abbāsīd Empire. Provincial governors became independent, and the caliphal administration in Baghdad fell into the hands of the Shi‘i Buyids.”¹⁴ It is against this setting that, as Kilpatrick remarks, “the grandiose conception of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* as a panorama of Arabic music and culture from the pre-Islamic period to the end of the third/ninth century should be seen.”¹⁵ One critical aspect here – to which we will return shortly – is that during this same time of chaos – ‘Abbāsīd song culture had fallen into serious decline due to a halt in patronage.¹⁶

Importantly, both al-Iṣfahānī as the compiler of this compendium and the patron who commissioned him to do it were fond of the song-and-singing-girl cultures that *Kitāb al-Aghānī* – as a multi-volume collection of famous songs – recorded and upon which it commented. This benefactor of al-Iṣfahānī was one cultured patron named Muḥammad al-Muḥallabī, an important vizier in the Būyid court, who was part of a vibrant and diverse intellectual circle in the Būyid court. It took al-Iṣfahānī fifty years to complete the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*,¹⁷ and he refers to his patron elliptically thus: “The reason why I embarked on writing it [sc. the *Aghānī*] was that one of our chief officers of state [ra’īs min ru’asā’inā] asked me to compile it for him.”¹⁸ Kilpatrick points out that “while little information

is extant about musical life in Buyid Baghdad, al-Muḥallabī was appreciative of singing and singing girls, and music was an indispensable part of the informal gatherings at which he and his closest companions indulged in witty conversation, poetry and fine wines, abandoning their usual decorum.”¹⁹

The immediate pretext for al-Iṣfahānī’s project arose from a need to rectify the situation concerning an existing, outdated *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, which had become discredited among court, elite circles. This earlier compilation dated back to what would have been perceived as the glorious era of the height of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate, under the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (reign 786–809 CE) of the famed *1001 Nights* era, and many songs in this prior one were linked with an even earlier era, the late Umayyad to early ‘Abbāsīd transitional era, and with the renowned musician of this transitional time, i.e., Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī. Al-Iṣfahānī believed, like his patron, that this prior one had become corrupted and was no longer genuine.²⁰ By rewriting the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, al-Iṣfahānī was aiming to reclaim these much earlier song materials and resituate this compendium onto a court trajectory from whence the first *Kitāb al-Aghānī* had originated. Therefore, the imperial project of re-writing the *Aghānī* could be regarded as a reclamation by the Būyid court of literary/musical materials, in a sense, to legitimate their usurpation of rule in Baghdad through the potential and promise of resurrecting the glorious era of the early ‘Abbāsīd caliphate. Was the making of the second *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, in effect, a Būyid imperial venture of cultural appropriation, legitimation and even, memory-making and preservation?

According to Kilpatrick, al-Muḥallabī was a committed patron and he was loyal to the “encouragement of culture [and efforts such as this] . . . made the Buyid period so important for Arabic intellectual history.”²¹ Furthermore, the vitality of the Būyid period for philosophical advances also is noteworthy. Greek epistemological and philosophical systems in the Muslim world that embraced Aristotle, Galen, and Ptolemy continued into the Būyid age and after:

By the time of the establishment of Būyid rule in Baghdad in 334/946, the urban cultivated elites had developed into various and at times competing groups, both within the religious sciences and outside them, including traditionists, theologians, jurists, grammarians, belletrists, scientists, and also *falāsifa*, the philosophers. The existence of at least one philosophical *majlis* (learned circle) especially focused on the Aristotelian corpus in fourth/tenth-century Baghdad is well attested, and by the early Būyid age *falsafa* was acknowledged as a proper field by both its practitioners and detractors.²²

Certainly, some of the most celebrated figures of Islamic cultural history were patronized by the Būyids and al-Iṣfahānī was one such famed recipient of this patronage.

Songs, song culture and Al-Iṣfahānī’s rendition of Majnūn Laylā

The *Aghānī*’s structure and framework is formed by a collection of one hundred songs (*al-aṣwāt al-mi’a al-mukhtāra*), selected more than a century before

al-Iṣfahānī's time, during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd. These "hit" songs, gathered together by famous musicians of the court of Hārūn, primarily the well-known musician Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (whose lifetime spanned the Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd time periods) and his son, Iṣḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī. These songs were essentially popular and well-liked poems that were set to music.²³ The *Aghānī* is organized in terms of pseudo-biographical entries, stories and/or vignettes devoted to the various poets who composed these verses and in each entry or story on a particular poet, each poem by that poet that became a "hit song" is framed with a heading "ṣawṭ" which literally means voice or sound, but here denotes "song." In the ninety-four-page chapter or entry on *Majnūn Laylā*, there are approximately fifty songs with the subheading "sawṭ." Al-Iṣfahānī evidently had a high regard for Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī and was much influenced by the musician's son Iṣḥāq al-Mawṣilī who actually served in the early 'Abbāsīd court of Hārūn al-Rashīd.²⁴ Indeed, the literary convention of using the "List of Top Hundred Songs" as the starting point seems to have been due to such a list attributed to Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī's son, Iṣḥāq al-Mawṣilī.²⁵

Ultimately, al-Iṣfahānī undertook an imperial courtly exercise but it would seem to also have been an exercise of passion and dedication. Such a deep dedication is demonstrated in and through the half-century time period he invested to produce this multivolume compendium, in effect, a rewriting and recasting of the older, aforementioned *Kitāb al-Aghānī* associated with the early 'Abbāsīd court of Hārūn al-Rashīd. The goal was to restore not just the earlier *Book of Songs*, but also to restore the eroded song culture linked with the songs or poems (i.e., poems set to songs) in this work – a song culture with which al-Iṣfahānī keenly identified. A school of elegiac love poets known as the 'Uḍhrī poets were especially important for the celebration and preservation of this song culture, given the amenability, in particular, of their love poems to be set to lyrical music.

We take up the term 'Uḍhrī in relation to the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* in Chapter Two, but suffice it to note here that the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* contains a lot of material that may be labeled 'Uḍhrī in the form of vignettes and stories about the 'Uḍhrī poets, and of course, their poetry. This is not surprising given that an 'Abbāsīd-era compendium devoted to Arabic poems set to music (or songs) would especially pay attention to love poems and love stories, as just remarked, and, especially to those of a lyrical type. It is also not surprising given that the very idea of a recognized genre cluster (with some that are more recognized than others) of 'Uḍhrī love stories comes to be standardized probably during the 'Abbāsīd period.²⁶ From among these 'Uḍhrī love stories, *Majnūn Laylā* is surely among the most famous. As regards the connections between love poems and song cultures, the *Majnūn* romance was doubly important in this regard. Charles Pellat has noted in his vital *Encyclopaedia of Islam* entry on "Madjnnun":

The story of Madjnnun and Laylā seems to have taken precedence over the majority of others of the same genre towards the end of the 3rd/9th century or the beginning of the 4th/10th; the fact that numerous verses taken from it were set to music, plus the importance attached to it by the *Aghānī*, leave no

doubt that the vogue which it subsequently enjoyed was not an entirely new development.²⁷

It is also interesting that the *ghazal* subgenre (with which the ‘Uḍhrī love stories were related) was being cultivated in the Būyid court at this time.²⁸

Hence, al-Iṣfahānī’s fascination with and longing for the sophisticated song culture associated with and going back to the early figure Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (spanning both Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd times) was likely heightened by the recognition that this song culture during his own lifetime had been destroyed due to the falling away of ‘Abbāsīd patronage. ‘Abbāsīd Arab patronage ended in fact when the ‘Abbāsīds no longer ruled Baghdad at the juncture in which the Būyid Iranian Shi‘ī Daylimi dynasty took over the capital. Kilpatrick has discussed how “there is a particular reason why Abū l-Faraj may have been more heartfelt in his regret at the passage of time than some other writers. The *Aghānī* chronicles how music and singing under the Umayyads and early ‘Abbāsīds became a highly developed art. From al-Mahdī on, the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs had patronised and encouraged music, thus contributing to its age of glory in the third/ninth century. But al-Mu‘tadīd (d. 289/902) was the last competent musician among the caliphs, and al-Radi (d. 329/940) the last caliph to leave a *diwan*; poetry of his was set to music too.”²⁹ After this time, ‘Abbāsīd caliphal support and patronage for this song culture just stopped and moreover, such culture came under scathing scrutiny by religious Sunni Hanbali conservatives in Baghdad. In any case, “thereafter patronage continued to be exercised by viziers and army commanders. While some viziers, like al-Muhallabi, were men of great culture, army commanders did not always understand Arabic – a serious handicap for the appreciation of music which was essentially vocal.”³⁰ Unlike, for instance the famous ninth-century polymath, belles-lettrist writer and theologian al-Jāhīz who cautioned against the role of Eros as it played a role in the tricks and wiles of the *qayān* or singing girls,³¹ al-Iṣfahānī demonstrated awareness and respect for the singing craft and technique, and saw them as positive elements that were indispensable to the flourishing of song and dance cultures within courtly and palace cultures of the tenth-century ‘Abbāsīd elites.³²

The *Kitāb al-Aghānī* thus is an ‘Abbāsīd/Būyid product, but one has to qualify this by stating that it possesses an earlier strata dating back at least to the time of the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd’s reign which was a context and milieu already highly impacted by the Greco-Arabian translation efforts and encounters. Hence, it is likely that this first *Kitāb al-Aghānī* foregrounded the construct of ‘romanticized Bedouin poet-lovers as entertainment’; such a construct would presumably have been linked with song and dance cultures of that era. But when the second *Kitāb al-Aghānī* is being produced by al-Iṣfahānī, this song culture was heavily discredited due to successive attacks by orthodox Hanbali premises and ideas.

The aforementioned Hanbali Sunni conservatives, namely mainstream Hanbalism (which “defended a strict constructionist interpretation of Islamic orthodoxy”)³³ summarily rejected this song and dance culture. Joseph N. Bell, in his important book, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, describes the Hanbali founder thus:

The forefather and prime authority of the [law] school, Ahmad b. Hanbal (164/780–241/855), suffered imprisonment and corporal punishment because he refused to sanction the Muʿtazilite [theological] doctrine of the created Koran imposed by the humanist caliph al-Maʿmun. In subsequent times Hanbalism continued to oppose, on occasion with violence, Shiʿism, speculative theology, Platonizing mysticism, and other movements or ideas which it perceived as threats to primitive [or what was perceived as an “original, pristine version” of] Islam.³⁴

Michael Cook and Kilpatrick both have discussed how, during the tenth century, the Hanbalis were on the rise in Baghdad, and this rise was in part facilitated by the political and economic chaos and crises of that era. They were avowedly hostile to music and singing, and they attacked and rioted around the dwellings of both musicians (including destroying their musical instruments) and singing girls.³⁵ An instrumental figure in organizing and leading some of these attacks and riots was Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-Barbahārī, a tenth-century Ḥanbalī Muslim theologian born in Baghdad. Courtly song and dance culture was also thus fiercely opposed.

Literary history, text/context and Majnūn Laylā

I approach the *Majnūn Laylā* textual material diachronically as a literary product of the tenth-century ʿAbbāsīd milieu in which al-Iṣfahānī dwelled, all the while not ignoring the embedding and layers from earlier chronological contexts (e.g., Umayyad *memoria* and pre-Islamic Bedouin contexts). Contextualization from these earlier milieus in my analysis is mainly accomplished through a reliance on historical markers³⁶ within the text of the romance but I also turn to pertinent external sources.³⁷ In sum, my approach to the romance narrative *Majnūn Laylā* reflects the assumption that it possesses degrees of “sedimentation” – in other words, possesses textual accretions of or from prior historical and literary contexts, e.g., the Umayyad period or even earlier. For one, clearly the tenth-century compendium of *Kitāb al-Aghānī* has Umayyad subtexts given that the whole work is based upon an early ʿAbbāsīd recorded list of “hit songs” which, in turn, likely were collected by Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī who lived, in part, during the Umayyad period. The songs by or of Majnūn are included in this list of “hit songs.” It is also interesting that, as Kilpatrick indicates, al-Iṣfahānī had some access to information about “late Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsīd poets” from a book that was left to him by his maternal uncle, and which he not only consulted but quoted from.³⁸

On the matter of the romance’s literary history, one may wonder why and how periodicity based upon dynastic factors (i.e., Umayyad dynasty versus ʿAbbāsīd dynasty, ‘big men history’) would be relevant to the examination of a literary romance such as *Majnūn Laylā*. Historical periodization is always integral to any literary history. But even more relevant here are the successive geographical shifts in the location of the “Islamic capitals” which implied changes and transformations in everything from patronage to the arts to displacements of peoples and concomitant disruptions in communal identities. For instance, “the location of the capital for each dynastic caliphate shifted first from Medina in the Arab peninsula

(founded initially by Muhammad the prophet) to Damascus in Syria (for the Umayyads) and then to Baghdad in Iraq (for the ‘Abbāsids). It is also important to note that the ‘Abbāsīd era is much longer and stretches from approximately mid-eighth century to about the thirteenth century; as for the Umayyad, it is much shorter, from approximately 661–750 CE. To some extent, periodicity is fluid and intersecting, especially in the lines of demarcation between the two caliphates. What constitutes ‘Abbāsīd and Umayyad “on the ground,” so to speak, is not always apparent in the sources – especially in the decades forming the transition from Umayyad to ‘Abbāsīd, roughly those decades between the 740s CE and the 770s CE. One thing, however, which is very clear and impactful are the shifts of metropolitan Islamic capitals.

To briefly further comment upon these shifts of metropolitan Islamic capitals, the very different cultural and historical trajectories of Syria and Baghdad going back to Antiquity profoundly shape the readings of the *Majnūn Laylā* romance. Once the conquest of Syria (635 CE) had been finalized, and the Umayyad caliphate established its capital in Damascus. When, for example, it came to the initial encounter between the Syrian Arabs and the Greek forms of knowledge and learning, it unfolded in and through Syrian Christian enclaves which were localized in communities that were steeped in Greek philosophy and medicine. Many of these Christians were not hostile to the Greek culture and some of its pagan aspects.³⁹ As for “the ‘Abbāsīd court, [it too] became [heavily] involved in the process of the acquisition of non-Qur’ānic sciences and during the first two centuries of the dynasty, beginning in 750 CE, translations into Arabic blossomed in the new capital, Baghdad.” The equally cultivated cosmopolitan elites of Baghdad, namely Persianized Arab and Perso-Sassanian communities – whose ethos was very different from that of the Byzantine Syrian Christians in Damascus – they too, promoted and patronized “the pathway of [Greek] transmission[s] . . . labelled ‘from Alexandria to Baghdad.’”⁴⁰ Suffice it to note that for the Muslims who took over, inhabited and embraced both these cultural centers at different times, Damascus was different from Baghdad and Baghdad was different from Damascus.

Both extant early Arabic versions of *Majnūn Laylā* are from the ‘Abbāsīd time period (respectively authored by, Ibn Qutayba, ninth century and al-Iṣfahānī, tenth century) and so, the ‘Abbāsīd output and shaping of the story is inarguable. Basically, the romance texts we examine in this book, are squarely situated during the ‘Abbāsīd historical phase. The main source analyzed is an encyclopedic compendium of the tenth century which contains a chapter concerning this love story. That is the bulk of the available evidence we have.

As regards the narrative units and verses connected with Majnūn, what merits attention is that between the pithy four-to-five page ninth-century version (in Ibn Qutayba’s anthology titled *Kitāb al-Shi‘r wal-Shu‘arā*, *Book of Poetry and Poets*) and the *Aghānī* tenth-century rendition, the sheer quantity of material increases twenty-fold: from about four pages to nearly a hundred pages. This too argues for a largely ‘Abbāsīd production of the romance narrative not to mention its reception in such a context. Everything present in the ninth-century version is also present in the tenth-century edition. To put it another way, every motif, theme, element

one way or another that is present in the ninth-century rendition also crops up in the tenth-century version. But the tenth-century version substantially adds to the ninth-century rendition – and so there is so much more in it. It elaborates, adds, deepens, augments all content aspects in the ninth-century one. It is not unreasonable to surmise that because the ninth century is closer to the transitions toward the Umayyad period, it may provide an easier access to the Umayyad *memorium*, especially in its poetry.

Ultimately, a key, overarching argument made in this book is that the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* bespeaks of an ‘Abbāsīd imprint to its product and project. It is about how the ‘Abbāsīds were conceptualizing their relation to the past in order to figure out their present – particularly to unpack issues of identity formation in their present. Hence, the romance engages with crucial issues and debates as regards ‘Abbāsīd Islamic identity and its construction of and relationship with the past. Because the ‘Abbāsīd historical context of this romance corresponds to exactly the phase during which, according to Nadia El Cheikh, there occurs a “profound reorganization of the past and of historical knowledge, leading to the crafting of a then widely accepted and agreed-upon version of the early Islamic past,”⁴¹ this love story, therefore, is heavily implicated in these same processes of “reorganization and crafting of knowledge pertaining to the early Islamic past.” Hence, this book argues that the *Majnūn Laylā* source(s) have to be put in conversation with the ‘Abbāsīd self-construction project entailing both a mode of relating to the Islamic past and constructing the Islamic present. It maintains that the story’s interrogations and/or shoring up of ‘Abbāsīd identity are executed primarily through its ideological uses of alterity.

Yet, methodologically the critic approaching the *Majnūn Laylā* romance recorded in an ‘Abbāsīd compendium has to pose questions and seek answers about one historical phase through examining another, since, as Nadia El Cheikh clarifies “dialogue in the Abbasid historical texts responded to episodes in ancient legend as well as to events that occurred in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries.” Thus, as regards our romance narrative, answers about the elements in it resonant with the preceding Umayyad historical phase are reached through studying the ‘Abbāsīd phase, or vice versa, answers about the elements in it resonant with its contemporaneous ‘Abbāsīd historical phase are reached through studying the prior Umayyad phase. Or even, given that ‘Abbāsīd texts responded to episodes in ancient legend, including perhaps Bedouin pre-Islamic (*al-Jāhiliyya*) legends, answers about the elements in the romance resonant with its contemporaneous ‘Abbāsīd historical phase are reached through engaging with the prior pre-Islamic phase. This interpretive dance back and forth is integral to the readings of the romance.

An even more important historiographical reason for this interpretive dance is due to the “central hermeneutical problem” confronted by anyone wanting to examine the first six to seven hundred years of Islamic history. Antoine Borrut and Paul Cobb, in their chapter “Introduction: Towards a History of Umayyad Legacies,” frame the critical question: “how do we know what we think we know about the Umayyads? To answer that question requires a brief consideration of

the history of Umayyad historical memory, one that includes how the Umayyads wanted to be remembered and how later generations shaped that memory for us (what we may, again following historians of memory, call Umayyad *memoria*).⁴² They go on to note:

Historians, of course, are inclined to seek refuge in literary texts to answer such questions. The writing of history in early Islamic times was closely bound up with issues of legitimacy (dynastic or otherwise), and so we would expect our textual sources to be logical sites for the relics of Umayyad *memoria*. But, as any student of early Islam knows, the fact is that we have very few texts that tell us about the Umayyads that have not been transmitted through other texts in some way – as quotations, allusions, or paraphrases in texts of the post-Umayyad age. All this in spite of (or perhaps because of) the essential role that the Umayyad dynasty had in building what Alfred-Louis de Prémare called “the foundations of Islam.” This fragmentary reception of the Umayyads is the central hermeneutical problem for anyone interested in the Umayyads, and it means that for direct access to Umayyad *memoria*, we have precious little textual information to use.⁴³

Borrut and Cobb comment on the complexities and intricacies of recovering what they term as the “Umayyad *memoria*” because the sources are mainly later and ‘Abbāsīd are echoed by Nadia El Cheikh:

Thus the major challenge in examining Islam’s formative period, from the rise of Islam until the fall of the Umayyad dynasty, is that the available evidence dates from the late second/eighth century at the earliest and is constituted of Abbasid narratives which were used to depict new conflicts as old ones. Dialogue in the Abbasid historical texts responded to episodes in ancient legend as well as to events that occurred in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries. Thus, answers about one historical phase are reached through studying another, and the historian’s task becomes that of discovering similarities among the accounts and investigating their various ramifications through new correlations.⁴⁴

Only to some extent do I distinguish between the invention/origination of the romance narrative and the processes of its performative reception/recreation and production/ augmentation – the former would have an Umayyad or earlier cast to it, whereas the latter are squarely situated within the urban ‘Abbāsīd milieu.

Contents and contours of Majnūn Laylā story in the Kitāb al-Aghānī

The *Aghānī* rendition of the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* consists of ninety-four pages of prose material interspersed with an abundant quantity of poetry. The *Majnūn Laylā* romance is not a coherent love story: it is episodic and anecdotal,

and its narrative prose is interspersed with poetry. The prose consists of textual units of varying length – each narrative unit termed *khavar* (plural, *akhbār*) in Arabic – arranged to form story cycles. I argue that each *khavar* unit, whether brief or long-winded, is characterized by some degree of narrative quality, no matter how minute. Each *akhbār* unit generally accompanies a set of verses, which may or may not be contextually embedded in it – and probably certainly not chronologically related to it.

The chapter on *Majnūn Laylā* in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, starts with a preamble in which al-Iṣfahānī analyzes the lack of historicity of Majnūn's character and makes disclaimers in order to protect his own authorial integrity. The preamble consists of about a dozen pages with al-Iṣfahānī probing and commenting upon the "identity" of Majnūn: who he was, whether or not he existed, his various names and tribal genealogies, the explanations and functions of his character's lack of fixed identity as regards the story, meanings and causes of motif of "madness" imputed to him, etc. Laylā's genealogy is also spelled out in this preamble. A historical touch is conveyed in it through the mention of the historical Umayyad character Nawfal ibn Musāhiq as well as his son and grandson in the context of a transmission. There is reason to grant al-Iṣfahānī a high degree of "literary and artistic forms of license" in compiling, arranging and otherwise shaping/framing/telling the narrative of *Majnūn Laylā* (with interspersed poetry).⁴⁵ Toward the end of this preamble or introductory section to the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, al-Iṣfahānī, as the compiler and composer of the stories in the *Aghānī*, he presents a disclaimer from being held accountable for the authenticity of Majnūn's poetry.⁴⁶ The text of the disclaimer translates thus: "I mention from what has come to me of his sets of commendable and fine '*akhbār*', absolving myself of any accountability for them. Indeed, [regarding] much of his mentioned poetry in his '*akhbār*', some of the narrators ascribe it to one other than him, and those that relate his ['*akhbār*'], ascribe it to him. [By] presenting this stipulation, I free myself from the blame of the attacker and the one prone to criticism."⁴⁷ Clearly al-Iṣfahānī, here, seeks to both protect and exercise his "authorial" authority and license. Indeed Kilpatrick appears to signal that in the entire ten to twelve multi-volume compendium of *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, nowhere else is this done in the manner and to the degree that al-Iṣfahānī does it with Majnūn's entry/biography; herein then we are able to discern an explicit treatment of the material by him.⁴⁸ In this preamble, al-Iṣfahānī also briefly comments on his composition methods, and provides the names of some of the chief narrators and transmitters (he distinguishes between oral and written transmission) as regards Majnūn, and upon which he relies.⁴⁹ These comments suggest that he is concerned with assembling the anecdotal (*khavar*) units into an overall story context, rather than simply using them to showcase the poetry and songs attributed to Majnūn.

Embedded within the overall framework of the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* are multiple storylines, and even within one story cycle, the romance may present more than one anecdote on a particular episode, some of which contradict, and others which enhance and corroborate each other. For example, the romance contains multiple versions of how the lovers met and fell in love, what caused

Majnūn to go mad, and of who ultimately played the pivotal role in the decision to marry Laylā to Ward (Laylā herself or her family). The unanswerable question of whether there is a “fundamental stratum of the tale,” or an “original text” of the romance raises the issue of its literary history and the contexts embedded in and associated with it – a matter I have taken up already. Apart from the chronologically different contexts associated with this romance, the reasons for this sedimentation in it are many. One of the main reasons is the oral transmission of the story.⁵⁰ Al-Iṣfahānī himself is fairly concerned about this issue since it reflects on his own reputation as a reliable transmitter and compiler, and accordingly, as we saw, he makes several disclaimers so that he may be absolved of any responsibility of having to prove authenticity regarding transmission. As noted, he acknowledges that many of the verses in the chapter are ascribed by narrators to poets other than Majnūn. In any case, the connection between the *khavar* unit and verses in this reported discourse is very fluid.

Importantly, the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* sets forth three ‘beginnings’: the first beginning depicts the couple as Bedouin childhood sweethearts who together used to tend the pastoral flocks of their families. Once they reach puberty, the beloved is veiled or cloistered from her suitor, Majnūn (pg. 11). The second beginning represents their encounter as unfolding in a Persianized Arab cultural tableau replete with a bevy of young damsels, Majnūn’s elegant discourse and dress, and his duel with a virile Arab goatherd. This version portrays them as youthful characters experiencing an attraction to each other within an Arab Bedouin-pseudo-Persianized setting that evokes poetry, flirtation and courtship. Majnūn sets forth as a “cultured and elegantly dressed” *ẓarīf*, in fine clothes and engaging in fine discourse and encounters Laylā among a bevy of women – only to be up-ended by a lowly but youthful Bedouin in Arab garb. Then he gets angry, recites verses and leaves. He comes back and finds Laylā in the courtyard and she begins to test him and flirt with him (whispering to another youth), and she then looks at him, and he is shocked, and she then recites her couplet to him – upon which he passes out, with the love for each other being in both of them in their hearts to excess degrees).⁵¹ Much later in the story, we encounter a third beginning: it references a subgenre known as *wasf* (i.e., verbal description of a beloved) which is akin to portraiture in the Arabic poetry context:

That he asked about the condition of Majnūn and Laylā, He said: Laylā was from Banī al-Ḥarīsh and she is the daughter of Maḥdī bin Sa’id Ibn Maḥdī Ibn Rabi’ah ibn al-Ḥarīsh, and she was the most beautiful and best of women in intellect and in manners and appearance, and Majnūn would enjoy the company of women and talking to them. So he heard of her and she was described to him, so he headed to her intending to visit her. He wore the best of clothes and used the best perfume he had, and he embarked on a camel he had and wore his sword and came to her, and he greeted her and she greeted him. He sat with her and they spoke to one another, and each one of them was impressed with the other, and they remained that way until night would

come, and he went back to his people and experienced the longest night he ever had, and he tried to close his eyes but he could not, so he began to say.
(pg. 44–45)

Regardless of which beginning is emphasized, what is related is the following in the *Aghānī*: After a vivid and vivacious courtship between them, during which Majnūn publicly serenades Laylā and declaims indiscreet verses about his relationship with her, her family bars him from visiting her. Majnūn then attempts “damage-control” by asking her father for her hand in marriage, but is flatly refused by the patriarch who claims they have been shamed. In part, as a consequence of the fame of Majnūn’s circulating poetry about her, Laylā has become a “star beloved” and she elicits the marriage proposals of many suitors, and she ultimately accepts or her kin accept a wedding proposal from a wealthy outsider from a remote tribe. Once he hears about this marriage proposal, Majnūn begins to lose his mind and though his family and father take him on the Hajj pilgrimage to beseech God to cure his love sickness, he remains traumatized. Majnūn withdraws from society to flee to the wilderness and its flora and fauna; its wild beasts offering him some comfort. He continues to proclaim and recite beautiful poetry about his beloved which spreads far and wide in the region. Even after Laylā is married, the lovers continue to have trysts when her husband is away, and in several anecdotes, it is related that her husband and lover engage in verbal jousts with each other over the issue of Majnūn’s continued public declamation of poetry about her. Majnūn, however, still dwells in the wilderness of the desert continuing to compose verses, and fittingly, finally, one day is found dead amid the craggy rocks by a tribesman who had sought him out for precisely his verses. One of his most vociferous enemies, Laylā’s father, is portrayed as distraught upon hearing of his death, and bemoans his harsh behavior with Majnūn, and attends his funeral.

In terms of form, first, it should be noted that the “turning point” or “reversal” comes early in the story’s chronology. Second, the story may be divided into two parts: the first contains and narrates the story’s beginning and middle, while the second part amplifies and adds details to the content of the first section and concludes the romance. This first part unfolds within the first thirty pages or so of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* romance chapter and it adheres to a loose chronology in terms of what happens. I say loose chronology because, in a few instances, it performs a kind of “fast forward” to events – for example, as regards the marriage episode wherein another man proposes to her. The second half emphasizes motifs and tropes ushered in earlier and/or focuses upon conveying poems as vehicles for songs. Indeed, the second part chiefly consists of some variants of the first part’s “narrations” and what may be described as “commentary” on the story. It does not advance the story in any significant manner with one exception. The only major exception to this is the important narrative unit at the very end of the story (Valley of al-Ghayl anecdote and verse, pg. 94). It is somewhat puzzling that al-Iṣfahānī transmitted and featured this anecdote at the very end of the entire love story,

especially as it offers good insights into why the “love went awry” in the first place, but perhaps a cogent explanation for this is that it no doubt builds up suspense for the intended audiences (addressed in Chapter Three). Another aspect to this concluding narrative unit is that it features Majnūn’s fellowship in poetry with the ‘Uḏhrī poet Qays ibn Dharrīh. As for Majnūn’s death, it directly precedes this important concluding Valley of al-Ghayl narrative, and the mention of his demise is recounted as follows:

When Majnūn of Banī ‘Āmir died, he was found in a rough land between black rocks, so his family came and the father of Laylā – the woman who he was in love with – was present, and he was the pride of his family, so when he saw him dead, he wept and took himself back and knew he had a share in his death.

(92)

Sui generis qualities of Majnūn Laylā romance in Kitāb al-Aghānī

This renowned love story’s power in terms of myth, symbol and image is profoundly generative and of immense ongoing and contemporary relevance. No other ‘Uḏhrī story has quite the same “symbolic and semantic overflow” that allows it to transcend its diverse literary, cultural and historical contexts. This is one reason that the *Majnūn Laylā* is the most famous of the ‘Uḏhrī romances. Even while acknowledging that it belongs to the ‘Uḏhrī love stories, I treat the *Majnūn Laylā* as a romance that is a unique member of the ‘Uḏhrī corpus, thus viewing it as *sui generis*. Internally, the story composition bears a uniqueness or singularity in its internal elements.

To give several key examples, first the ambiguities regarding his identity which the long preamble rather methodically takes up – just who or what was Majnūn or al-Majnūn? This extended preamble bears much promise in terms of generating powerful dynamics involving myth, symbol and image. Second, H. Ritter, in his translation of the Kračkovskij detailed textual-critical essay that also addresses the (possible) historical bases for the story of Majnūn and Laylā, states the following in the Afterword: “That the interest at the court of the caliphs in the Majnūn-Laylā story was connected with the interest of the mystics in the same story will be difficult to assert; but that mysticism was associated with Majnūn early on, and not with any of the ‘Uḏhrīes as exemplary heroes of spiritual experience, suggests that his way of experiencing love was felt to be essentially different from that of the ‘Uḏhrīes. And this essential feature contributed instantly to the popularity of Majnūn, where one was able to pick it out and identify it definitively.”⁵²

Thirdly, as As‘ad Khairallah has noted “he [Majnūn] is the only love-poet [from among the ‘Uḏhrī poets] who is described as actually insane, and who leaves society in order to live and die with the wild animals of the desert.”⁵³ He is the most socially transgressive⁵⁴ of the ‘Uḏhrī characters with whom are associated

a cluster or set of motifs crystallizing in that of the ‘Abbāsid-era “romanticized construct of the Bedouin”: obsessiveness, errancy, wandering and wilderness. The motif of Majnūn, as the “wild man,” is a profoundly important and subversive aspect, and found only in this romance from among the ‘Uḏhrī love stories. Moreover, there is the uniqueness of the explicit ambiguities concerning the historicity of the Majnūn figure. As regards its literary and performative history as well as its literary reception, no other ‘Uḏhrī story or similar Arabic genre of this time period has acquired such a widespread fame since this tenth-century rendition. In part, this fame is due to the Persian litterateur Nizāmī’s twelfth-century version – but that work in all its richness would not be possible without nearly wholesale engagement with the Arabic rendition conveyed by al-Iṣfahānī. In other words, few Arabic literary works from this era have had the longevity temporally and geographically that *Majnūn Laylā* does.

Speaking of the aforementioned “symbolic and semantic overflow,” scholars have not availed themselves of identifying what I would call “signature episodes” that stud the story. By “signature episodes,” I mean those happenings or episodes that come to be richly and multifariously represented across temporal and cultural zones in the narrative, visual and performative “after-lives” of this Arabic romance, and thus, they constitute its signature or unique imprint. As a cluster, they are uniquely associated with the tenth-century Arabic edition of the *Majnūn Laylā* romance and provide it with singularity in all its subsequent appropriations and transformations. Given the trans-cultural crossings of this love story into the performance and artistic traditions of other times and locales, these “signature episodes” persist also in the crossing over of the story and indeed, announce it (to its various audiences throughout space and time) and label it in terms of its unique identity. The signature episodes (in loose order within the story) may be listed as the following:

- 1 Nawfal ibn Musāhiq episode
- 2 Hajj or Mecca pilgrimage episode
- 3 Majnūn’s desert wandering and dwelling amicably among animals
- 4 His father’s visit to him
- 5 Laylā’s visit to him

Suffice it to note that the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* is the principal source that later Arabic renditions and versions of *Majnūn Laylā* drew upon, and it is not inaccurate to state that importantly “the literary elaboration of the legend of Majnūn in Arabic circles never went beyond this stage.”⁵⁵ Concerning the Arabic elaborations of *Majnūn Laylā* in the medieval period, Charles Pellat notes the following:

In the Arabic literature subsequent to the *Aghānī*, the *akhbār* of Madjnuun recur in a number of works of *adab*, in particular in those which concern famous romances (like *Tazyin aswāk* of Dāwūd al-Anṭākī, ed. Beirut 1972, i, 97–128), but little is known of independent monographs, apart from the *Dīwān* and two works which have yet to be edited: the *Nuzhat al-musāmīr*

fi dhikr ba'd akhbār Madjnūn Banī 'Āmir, by Yūsuf b. al-Ḥasan al-Mibradī (d. 909/1503) and *Bašt al-sāmi' al-musāmīr fi akhbār Madjnūn Banī 'Āmir*, by Ibn Ṭulūn (d. 953/1546). It is remarkable, but not entirely unexpected, that the story of *Madjnūn wa-Laylā* should have inspired no literary work in Arabic in the Middle Ages; in fact, it is not until the present day that one sees the theme exploited by several dramatists.⁵⁶

For these manifold reasons and others, I have chosen to focus my analysis in this book upon the *Aghānī* rendition of the romance, though I have also drawn on and discussed the *Aghānī* versions of the other 'Udhri romances.

Notes

- 1 Again: *Majnūn Laylā*. In *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, comp. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, Vol. 2 (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah al-Misriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1992), 1–97.
- 2 A comprehensive work in the English-language on this compendium is that by Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs: Compilation and the Author's Craft Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahani's Kitāb al-Aghānī* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003). It also should be noted that, in references to this work throughout my book, I alternate between the Arabic transliteration of this title and its English translation, namely, *Book of Songs*.
- 3 Ibn Qutayba, Abū Muhammad, *Al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'ara*, 2 vols, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shakir (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif bi Misr, 1966). Also consult: I. J. Krackovskij, "Die frühgeschichte der erzählung von Macnūn und Laila in der arabischen literatur," trans. H. Ritter, (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 1–50.
- 4 Sebastian Guenther, "Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third Edition, ed. Kate Fleet, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
- 5 Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs: Compilation and the Author's Craft Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahani's Kitāb al-Aghānī* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 23. Some thirty titles are attributed to him but most are lost.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 7 Kilpatrick quotes al-Iṣfahānī: "I can only ask God for help. For the situation is too terrible to describe." "Historical facts support such an outburst. The first half of the fourth/tenth century was characterised by fighting among army commanders and their troops drawn from different ethnic groups, intrigues round the caliph, financial crises, price rises, riots and a breakdown in urban security leading to attacks on the houses of the wealthy and the less wealthy. More ominous for the future of Iraq, the irrigation system declined steadily from lack of maintenance and suffered serious damage in conflicts between army factions. So profoundly was Baghdad affected by these developments that its built-up area in 345/956 was reduced to a tenth of what it had been under al-Muqtadir (295/908–320/932), according to a judge quoted by al-Tanukhi; even if this remark is not wholly accurate, it reflects a certain perception which must have been widespread among the elite." *Ibid.*, 21.
- 8 Kilpatrick, in her book, states that there are four Arabic-language biographies on al-Iṣfahānī. In briefly assessing each, she refers to one biographer, Mumammad Aḥmad Khalafallah (the biography is titled *Sāhib al-Aghānī Abū l-Faraj al-Rāwīya*.) whom she feels is less than objective about al-Iṣfahānī's lifestyle: "But Khalafallah's book is not without its problems. He does not hide the fact that he finds Abū l-Faraj's personal traits, and in particular his bohemian way of life and sexual preferences, distasteful." *Ibid.*, 7–8.
- 9 Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs*, 18.

- 10 During the fourth/tenth century there was a wide variety of Shi‘i opinion . . . that the Zaydiyya, to which Abū l-Faraj belonged, was . . . at the opposite end of the spectrum from the *ghulat* (“extremists”).” Ibid., 8, 15.
- 11 Abū’l-Hasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, trans. Joseph Norment Bell and Hassan Mahmood Abdul Latif Al Shafie (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2005), xv.
- 12 Ibid., xvi.
- 13 Ibid., xv.
- 14 Nadia El-Cheikh, *Women Islam and ‘Abbāsī Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 5–6.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Kilpatrick declares that: “There is thus no indication of when or how he met the man who became his long-standing patron, Abū Mumammad al-Masan ibn Mumammad al-Muhallabi.
Al-Muhallabi belonged to a family which had started to play a part in Islamic history as early as al-Iṣfahānī himself” Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs*, 18.
- 17 Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs*, 45.
- 18 Ibid., 19.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid., 28.
- 21 “Al-Muhallabi sought to establish and preserve his reputation by generosity and intelligent patronage. He was the first of the remarkable viziers whose encouragement of culture made the Buyid period so important for Arabic intellectual history; to one contemporary the gatherings of his salon recalled the golden age of the Barmakids.” Ibid., 18.
- 22 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third Edition, s.v. “Greek into Arabic,” by Cristina, D’Ancona, accessed January 1, 2019, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27523.
- 23 Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs*, 2.
- 24 “He also has a high regard for Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (d. 296/309), both because of his knowledge of musical theory and practice, and for his poetic style, which he defends eloquently. He champions Abū Tammam (d. 231/845) against those who criticise him and exaggerate his shortcomings in order to improve their own standing. The singer ‘Arib (d. 277/891) is a leading figure of earlier musical life whom he admires, as his attack on her detractors shows. Finally, although not strictly speaking a figure of the past, for Abū l-Faraj could have seen him in his youth, ‘Ubaydallah ibn ‘Abdallah ibn Tahir (d. 300/913) is portrayed as representing the ideal of the courtier and administrator possessing an all-round culture which included both the Arabian and the Greek sciences, poetic gifts and knowledge of musical theory and practice.” Ibid., 17.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 *Jamīl Buthayna*, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, comp. Abul Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, Vol. 8 (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Misriyya al-‘Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1992), 91–154; *Kuthayyir ‘Azzah*, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, comp. Abul Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, Vol. 3 (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Misriyya al-‘Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1992), 3–48; *Qays Lubnah*, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, comp. Abul Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, Vol. 9 (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Misriyya al-‘Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1992), 180–249.
- 27 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. “Madjnoun Laylā,” by Charles Pellat, et al., accessed May 18, 2019, [doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0608](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0608).
- 28 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. “Ghazal,” by R. Blachère and A. Bausani, accessed June 23, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0232.
- 29 Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs*, 22.
- 30 Ibid.

- 31 It is possible that al-Jāhiz's remarks regarding Eros were a function of be a "rhetorical exercise, and thus should not be taken as a sincere expression of his beliefs – that is to say, he may well have adopted a [kind of rhetorical] "anti-Eros" stance . . . in some of his writing.") I am thankful to an anonymous Press reviewer for this observation. Cf. also James Montgomery, *Al-Jāhiz: In Praise of Books* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).
- 32 Matthew S. Gordon, "Yearning (jidd) and Disquiet: al-Jāhiz and the Singing Girls," in *Al-Jāhiz: A Muslim Humanist for Our Time*, eds. Amin Heinemen, et al. (Beirut: Orient Institut and Wurzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2009), 264–266.
- 33 "From the beginning the mainstream of Hanbalism has resolutely and at times courageously defended a strict constructionist interpretation of Islamic orthodoxy." Joseph N. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1979), 1.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 This includes but is not limited to the mention of actual Umayyad figures (e.g., Umayyad governor, caliph 'Abd al-Mālik, as well as the Umayyad governor of Medina, Nawfal ibn Musāhiq) and other elements.
- 37 I mean here sources such as genealogical works on the 'Āmir b. Sa'sa'a, information from secondary sources on this tribe's political position in the early pre-Umayyad and Umayyad time periods and on the significance of the "north vs. south" tribal rivalry, and anthropological writing on the conjugal systems of early Arabia.
- 38 Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs*, 14. But contrary to what we may find in a good deal of 'Abbāsīd literature, the chapter concerning Majnūn appears to have very little, if any really, anti-Umayyad aspects – perhaps a few instances peeping through the text (e.g., maybe the substitution of Husayn for Nawfal in one of the anecdotes). It is mainly an artistic work (as is the *Aghānī* itself a work of music and art and literature) and not a polemical one.
- 39 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd Edition, s.v. "Greek into Arabic," by Cristina, D'Ancona, accessed January 1, 2019, http://dx.doi.org/ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27523.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 El Cheikh, *Women, Islam and 'Abbasid Identity*, 13.
- 42 Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb, "Introduction: Toward a History of Umayyad Legacies," in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2–3.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 El Cheikh, *Women, Islam and 'Abbasid Identity*, 13.
- 45 Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs*, 26–30.
- 46 *Majnūn Laylā*, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 2: 11.
- 47 Ibid., 2: 11–12.
- 48 Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs*, 101.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 The oral transmission of the story raises the matter of the historically arbitrary nature of the links between its anecdotes (*akhbār*) and verses. It may be stated at the outset, as Michael Zwettler has argued in his *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry*, that the verses "cannot be accounted a stable or intrinsic element of any but a very few such narratives," primarily since the poetry and prose constituting *Majnūn Laylā* in the *Aghānī* are clearly based on a long-standing (over two centuries) oral tradition, but also because the historicity of Majnūn is so problematic. [Michael Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978), 205.] Al-Isfahānī himself is fairly concerned about this issue since it reflects on his own reputation as a reliable transmitter and compiler, and accordingly, he makes several disclaimers so that he may be absolved of any responsibility of having to prove

authenticity regarding transmission. He acknowledges that many of the verses in the chapter are ascribed by narrators to poets other than Majnūn. In any case, the connection between the *khavar* unit and verses in this reported discourse is very fluid.

- 51 *Majnūn Laylā*, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 2: 13–14.
- 52 Nachwort des Übersetzers, pp. 49–50: “Dass das Interesse für die Macnūn-Lailā geschichte am Chalifenhof mit dem Interesse der Mystiker an der gleichen geschichte in Zusammenhang gestanden habe, wird sich schwer behaupten lassen; aber dass die mystik schon so früh ihn und nicht irgendwelche ‘Udriten als beispielhaften helden seelischen erlebens rezipierte, zeigt doch, dass seine art, die liebe zu erleben, als wesentlich verschieden von der ‘Udritenliebe empfunden wurde. Und diese wesentliche besonderheit wird von dem augenblick an zur popularität Macnuns beigetragen haben, wo man imstande war, sie herauszufühlen und positive zu werten.” Krackovskij, “Die Frühgeschichte der Erzählung von Macnūn und Lailā in der Arabischen Literatur,” 50.
- 53 As‘ad Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry: An Interpretation of the Majnūn Legend* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft, 1980), 2.
- 54 Majnūn ambiguously publicly risks his beloved’s reputation as a virgin – in direct contravention of the ‘Uḏhrī code of chastity. It is this indiscretion and its link with the issue of “chastity undermined” that frames him as the most transgressive of the ‘Uḏhrī lovers. This is why Vadet refers to Majnūn as a hero “plus moderne et moins tribal. Magnūn est donc un type, presque un héros à thèse,” and why he describes the romance as “*l’adab* contre lui-meme.”
- 55 Alessio Bombaci, *History and Notes in Fuzūlī: Leylā and Mejnūn*, trans. Sofi Huri (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970), 50.
- 56 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. “Madjnoun Laylā,” by Charles Pellat, J. T. P. Bruijn, B. Flemming, and J. A. Haywood, accessed May 18, 2019, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0608.

2 On the term ‘Uḏhrī and its symbolic universe for understanding *Majnūn Laylā*

The term and concept ‘Uḏhrī is very often applied to *Majnūn Laylā* in the popular imagination and scholarly criticism. Given the ubiquity of the word ‘Uḏhrī to Majnūn and his ‘Abbāsīd literary material, this chapter takes up the matter of unpacking and analyzing this term. Much ink has been spilled on trying to understand the term ‘Uḏhrī – what is it and how to define it? Is it a social or literary phenomenon or both? Confusions abound. Renate Jacobi has produced a number of important publications regarding the ‘Uḏhrī subgenre. In the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Jacobi provides an entry on the term ‘Uḏhrī. Jacobi begins by describing it in terms of tribe; She states that there emerged during “the Umayyad period, an elegiac amatory genre . . . among poets of the [‘Uḏhrā] tribe” located in “the northern part of al-Ḥidjāz [i.e., Arabian peninsula] in the region of Wādī ‘l-Ḳurā.”¹ Next, she describes ‘Uḏhrī love (*al-ḥubb al-‘uḏhrī*) as a theme and remarks: “‘Uḏhrī love is a favorite theme in classical Arabic poetry and prose.”² Jacobi then also calls it “the ‘Uḏhrī phenomenon” or labels it as an “authentic manifestation” or as “the new ideal in love.”³ The variety of terminology and approaches used to describe this topic in one reputable scholarly essay speaks to the challenges present in defining it. Is the word ‘Uḏhrī a catch-all term that connotes diverse aspects in different socio-cultural periods and different literary registers? What is often referred to as an ‘Uḏhrī “code of chastity” regarding the ‘Uḏhrī romances thus begs for scrutiny and analysis especially as applied to the ‘Abbāsīd period.

In my view, the term ‘Uḏhrī embraces tribal-affiliation, genre considerations (including themes and motifs) and what I call ‘persona and performance’ (these last two particularly expressive of ideals and values). It could be stated that what is called ‘Uḏhrī is defined by the three “p’s” situated mainly within the ‘Abbāsīd period: namely persona, performance and poetry and urban fashion and fashionableness are not irrelevant to this. Majnūn is identified as an ‘Uḏhrī and his narrative actions and poems all fall within the ‘Uḏhrī genre. Moreover, his persona generically resembles that of the ‘Uḏhrī lovers and their stories. There is a misconception that Majnūn is an ‘Uḏhrī out of tribal affiliation.⁴ This is not part of his genealogy (i.e., he is not from the tribe called Banū ‘Uḏhrā) actual or as a construct. Indeed, the most renowned poet of and belonging to the Banū ‘Uḏhrā is his fellow and rival poet Jamīl who consistently is genealogically linked with

that tribe. In the following narrative from the *Aghānī* rendition of *Majnūn Laylā*, members of the Banū 'Uḏhrā are distinguished from the Banū 'Āmir b. Ṣa'ṣa'a – the latter being the Bedouin tribal affiliation of Majnūn:

Al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī informed us: He said Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Ṣūfī narrated to us, he said Ibrahīm ibn Sad al-Zuhrī said: A man from the tribe of 'Uḏhrā came for something, and it so happened that *al-'ishq* and *al-'ushshāq* were mentioned. Then I said to him: Are you more delicate of heart or the Banū 'Āmir? He said: We are certainly the most delicate of people in matters of the heart, but Banū 'Āmir has overcome us with their madman [*bi-majnūnihā*].⁵

It is interesting that Majnūn's tribal name (Qays ibn al-Mulawwah) is omitted here. This is very likely an 'Abbāsīd-era narrative given its invocations of the two terms *al-'ishq* (Eros, passionate love) and *al-'ushshāq* (a word derived from *'ishq* and a plural meaning 'the lovers who practice this Eros love') – both these terms gained full currency in the 'Abbāsīd period. That an 'Uḏhrī tribesman (the tribe portrayed as the pre-eminent producer of 'Uḏhrī-style lovers) is shown conceding that the Banū 'Āmir has overpowered them with their Majnūn lends an air of authenticity to the 'Abbāsīd-era fame and popularity of Majnūn.

In terms of both historical factors and literary aspects, this thing called 'Uḏhrī (as persona, performance and poetry) is a big part of "the romanticization of the Bedouin . . . that literary creation of the 'Abbāsīd urban period." Most 'Uḏhrī poets are fashioned with Bedouin identities, but of course, not all Bedouins are 'Uḏhrī. What is likely is that even tribal identity dimensions that often contain a historical Umayyad imprint – even these dimensions are to be viewed as constructs during and of the 'Abbāsīd period. One wonders whether Majnūn is a somewhat atypical 'Uḏhrī poet or perhaps is he the "most 'Uḏhrī of the 'Uḏhrī," depending on how one looks at it?

'Uḏhrī genre considerations

Some brief remarks on early Arabic love literature are in order given that 'Uḏhrī love literature is a subset of this broader category. Early Arabic love literature (from circa the sixth to the thirteenth centuries CE) divides into two intersecting broad classes as delineated by Joseph N. Bell: (1) what we may term the "imaginative" literature on love (including poetry, anecdotes/narrative units or stories)⁶ and (2) what may be the expository literature or discourse on love which often cites from or refers to the first class. We will discuss this expository literature or discourse on love at the end of this chapter.

When it comes to genre considerations, the 'Uḏhrī corpus of imaginative literature on love consists of both poetry and narrative (e.g., anecdotes, stories). The poetry and prose deserve separate considerations. Taking up poetry first, in Renate Jacobi's words again, there emerged during "the Umayyad period, an elegiac amatory genre [of poetry] . . . among poets of the ['Uḏhrā] tribe."⁷ This 'Uḏhrī subgenre of poetry is one strand of what is called the Umayyad *ghazal*

and the word *ghazal* in Islamic literatures constitutes the precise term for “love poem.” As regards the term *ghazal*, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2nd edition states the following:

[T]he idea evoked by the [earliest Arabic uses of the] term . . . became elaborated in a realm of ideas where there mingle the notions of flirtation, compliments made to a lady, complaints at her coldness or inaccessibility and the description of effeminate languishing attitudes on the part of the lover (cf. the noun-adjective *ghazil*, “affected, mincing, without vigour” . . .). The word *ghazal*, as early as in a line of al-Akḥṭal (ed. Ṣalḥānī, 142), is associated with *lahw* “pleasure.”⁸

The Arabic word *ghazal* has many resonances and links with the pre-Islamic ode’s amatory or love prelude (i.e., the *nasīb*).⁹ The differences between the two are that one is a love prelude, that is, it opens up or into a longer part of the poem (i.e., the ode), and the other is a stand-alone love poem. In other words, Whereas the *ghazal* including the Umayyad *ghazal* constitutes an independent poem, the *nasīb* is the love prelude to a longer poem called the ode or *qaṣīda* linked with *al-Jāhiliyya* – the latter is said to date back to the pre-Islamic period.

Just as Renate Jacobi remarks, there are “two variants of this amatory Umayyad *ghazal*,” and they are (1) the ‘Uḏhrī *ghazal* and (2) the urban or town *ghazal* of ‘Umar b. Abī Rabi’a.”¹⁰ The second of these, the *ghazal* of ‘Umar b. Abī Rabi’a, sometimes also known as the Hijāzī *ghazal*, is characterized by an urban gloss and diction (urban as in from the city-towns of Mecca and Medina) and has a non-sentimental quality, often suggestive of sexual intimacy because its main practitioner is the Meccan rakish poet, ‘Umar b. Abi Rabi’a, a seventh-century poet (possibly born 644 CE).¹¹ To some extent, this Hijāzī *ghazal* is quite different from the ‘Uḏhrī one. James Montgomery identifies the following constitutive elements of the Hijāzī *ghazal*:

the seductive prowess of the proud poet (an object of adoration for both poet and beloved), the desert *mise-en-scène* (even for municipal dramas), the blend of all-consuming ardour (similar in spirit to the love known as *Uḏhrī* . . .) and the performative, physical love known as *Ḥidjāzī*, the dialogue of beloved with companion(s), the nocturnal invasion of the woman’s tent (here very reminiscent of [the pre-Islamic poet] Imru’ al-Ḳays’s poem), combined in the manner of a bipartite, polythematic *qaṣīda* [*qaṣīdah*].¹²

It is easy to see the many similarities between are the ‘Uḏhrī *ghazal* and the urban or town *ghazal* of ‘Umar b. Abī Rabi’a – yet when both are read, there are distinct differences between the two in moods and affects evoked, with the ‘Uḏhrī *ghazal* being expressive of a masculinity that is less playful and man-about-town than the one represented in the so-called urban *ghazal*.

The Umayyad *ghazal* is deemed to chronologically and generically be followed by what is dubbed as the ‘Abbāsīd *ghazal*: “i.e., the ‘Abbāsīd “courtly” *ghazal*

[whose main proponent was one] al-‘Abbās b. al-Aḥnaf (d. between 188/803 and 195/ 810). He is recognized as the most “courtly” of ‘Abbāsīd poets, who . . . [views] himself in the ‘Uḏhrī tradition.”¹³ The use of the term “courtly” to perhaps describe the ‘Abbāsīd *ghazal* is more germane – as al-Aḥnaf was intimately connected with the sophisticated urban [‘Abbāsīd] court culture of the ninth and tenth centuries.

Courtly and Ẓarīf “fashionable” subcultures

The term “courtly” in the ‘Abbāsīd-era *Majnūn Laylā* romance connotes the following three sometimes overlapping, masculine, performative aspects: social class, urban cosmopolitanism and mastery of (Arabic) language. More than anything else, “courtliness” or “being courtly” is integral to the ‘Abbāsīd-era ‘Uḏhrī construct defined by the three “p’s”: namely persona, performance and poetry. The three concrete factors of social class, urban cosmopolitanism and eloquence in Arabic language resonate with “persona, performance and poetry.” It should be pointed out that the links between eloquent speech and male virility are very pronounced in Arabic literature in general as well as in the logocentric qualities of Islam. All this intermixes with constructs of masculinities in the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* and the ‘Abbāsīd milieu in general. Most narrowly construed in the context at hand, “courtly” could mean of or pertaining to the fashions of the caliphal court (i.e., the Abbasid court in Baghdad). Fashion and fashionable are critical here when the three aforementioned connotations (i.e., social class, urban cosmopolitanism and linguistic eloquence) are considered.

One begins to discern the ludic dimensions of the primitivist processes of “the romanticization of the Bedouin . . . that literary creation of the ‘Abbasid urban period” that draw upon “courtliness.” When R. Jacobi observes that in “the early ‘Abbāsīd period ‘Uḏhrī poets and their beloved were transformed into heroes of romantic stories, and their concept of love was imbued with a “courtly” flavor and projected back into an idealised Bedouin past,”¹⁴ this simply means that such a “courtly flavor” was an aspect of the ‘Abbāsīd cultural primitivist constructions of the romanticized Bedouin. At least with the ‘Uḏhrī romance of *Majnūn Laylā*, it is not difficult to see how – with certain literary accents and touches – al-Iṣfahānī plays with the motif of “courtliness” as regards Majnūn’s ‘Uḏhrī persona. Yet what is key is that al-Iṣfahānī assembles and crafts a narrative that alternately renders him heroic and almost anti-heroic, a romantic hero, at times, and at other times, a rather absurdly pathetic romantic figure, for example, almost one that may be a precursor to the Don Quixote figure in the chronologically much later work by the Spanish writer Cervantes.¹⁵ For instance, there is ““elegance and class” (the ẓarīf component discussed shortly) imputed to Majnūn in some narratives in the *Aghānī* version of *Majnūn Laylā* but it is actually cast as an ‘Abbāsīd element of parody or satire.

Persona and performance and poetry (i.e., linguistic eloquence) are all implied in the “refined code of behavior” associated with the ẓarīf subculture. Jacobi at another point observes that: “[a second] more realistic strand, ‘Uḏhrī love is

not so much an emotion or state of mind, but a code of behaviour among lovers . . . it can be associated with the literary and social ideal of *ẓarīf* (refinement), described in detail by al-Washshā' (d. 325/936 . . .) in his *Kitāb al-Muwashshā'*.¹⁶ This subculture, in its mature stage, is squarely a byproduct of the Greco-Arabian revolution which created a worldview of ironic, ludic distance vis-à-vis the Bedouin past, including the *Jāhiliyya*. Such a *ẓarīf* subculture flourished when the Bedouin past suddenly became an object of fascination, entertainment and *fashion*.

Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian ideas and subcultures informed how fashion-conscious male 'Abbāsid Muslim masculinities cultivated a *ẓarīf* subculture and *ẓarīf* groups of social cliques. It was "fashionable" to be "chaste" and it was "fashionable" in urban Baghdadi milieus to consult and quote 'Uḏhrī poetry and anecdotes. Thus, it is primarily in terms of fashionable trends that the following comments regarding "chastity" have to be assessed (with my inserts of the word 'fashionable'). After pointing out that the eighth chapter of the *Kitāb al-Zahra* by Ibn Dāwūd is titled "A *ẓarīf* should be chaste" (*man kāna ẓarīfan fal-yakun 'aḥḥan*), W. Raven points out: "Whatever pious or other private reason Ibn Dāwūd may have had to advocate, or even to practice chastity, this notion was also doubly and firmly rooted in the [fashionable] culture of his days, albeit in a side stream of it. In poetry and narrative literature there was the (fashionable) 'Uḏhrī tradition of chaste love: poets spent their lives yearning for an unreachable lady or, if an occasional reunion was achieved, both lovers refrained from touching each other. The eighth chapter of the *Kitāb al-Zahra* abounds with poems in this vein." Raven suggests, that, for the *ẓarīf*, 'Uḏhrī poetry and narratives figured quite prominently as part of their subculture and here the emphasis again must be upon "their fashionable and trendy subcultures" in which constructs of "chastity" played a role: "Chastity was also one of the *ṣunān al-zarf*. Al-Washshā', in his fourteenth chapter, adduces several definitions of *zarf* which include chastity (*iffa*). The *zurafa'* were fond of 'Udhrite poetry and anecdotes as the same chapter suggests. It remains to be investigated to what extent they enriched 'Udhrite literature themselves."¹⁷ Two key points are that (1) the term "chastity" has to be taken up in terms of "fashionable performance," and (2) courtly persona and performance and poetic sensibilities all inform these fashionable trends including "acting chaste or performing chastity."

As for the much larger, much weightier issue of resonances and links between these Arabo-Islamic conceptions of "courtly and courtliness" and medieval Euro-Christian troubadour tradition, there already exists a rich scholarly trajectory of publications that broaches this vexing question. What, if any, are the interconnections between *Majnūn Laylā* and the Arabic 'Uḏhrī material, on the one hand, and the chronologically later conceptions and/or practices of "courtly love" associated with medieval European literary traditions, on the other hand?¹⁸ While caution is prudent here, it would be equally imprudent to divorce the term "courtly" as applied to the *Majnūn Laylā* romance from its later connotations in medieval European literatures (e.g., the troubadours). Certainly, the overlapping performative aspects of "courtliness" as I have defined it (i.e., social class,

urban cosmopolitanism and mastery of language) are evident in these historically subsequent trends of “courtly love” associated with medieval European literary traditions and contexts.

‘Uḏhrī periodicities and the challenges

From among the ‘Uḏhrī love stories – as noted before – *Majnūn Laylā* is surely among the most famous. The names of the more famous Arabic ‘Uḏhrī lovers always consist of the names of the both the lover and beloved juxtaposed in a possessive grammatical construct: for example, Majnūn Laylā is the Majnūn belonging to or of the female beloved, namely Laylā. Hence, the Arabic title of the love story may reflect this, i.e., *Majnūn Laylā* refers to both the male poet-love, Majnūn, and his female beloved, namely Laylā, and again, the title phrase *Majnūn Laylā* may be translated as “Majnūn of [or belonging to] Laylā.” As for the ‘Uḏhrī poets, the main names consecrated in the ‘Abbasid sources are as follows: Jamīl, Kuthayyir, Qays, ‘Urwa and Majnūn. Majnūn’s tribal, again, is Qays ibn al-Mulawwaḥ, and he is not to be confused with the other aforementioned Qays, namely Qays ibn Dharrīh. Although this book concerns specifically the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*, it is unavoidable that references to ‘Uḏhrī poets and other love stories of the ‘Uḏhrī subgenre crop up in the book.

Up to a point, this book takes seriously Renate Jacobi’s call expressed in the following astute comments:

In the early ‘Abbāsid period ‘Uḏhrī poets and their beloved were transformed into heroes of romantic stories, and their concept of love was imbued with a “courtly” flavour and projected back into an idealised Bedouin past. As a consequence, the biographies of poets reckoned among the ‘Uḏhrīs are embellished with legendary details, and their poetry contains spurious verses or must be regarded in its entirety of ‘Abbāsid origin. It further appears that traditions about ‘Uḏhrī lovers reported in treatises on profane love reflect intellectual trends of later periods. As a first step to clarify these complicated issues, it is essential to distinguish between *al-ḥubb al-‘Uḏhrī* as an authentic manifestation of Umayyad Bedouin society and its subsequent transformations in the urban centres of mediaeval Islam.¹⁹

The last line is key: “it is essential to distinguish between *al-ḥubb al-‘Uḏhrī* as an authentic manifestation of Umayyad Bedouin society and its subsequent transformations in the urban centres of mediaeval Islam.” While Jacobi does not mention the word ‘Abbasid in the aforementioned quotation, it is implied in the overall context of this quotation. It is noteworthy that Jacobi uses the words “authentic” and “Bedouin” in describing the Umayyad form of ‘Uḏhrī love in contrast to her employment of the words “urban” and “centres” when speaking of its ‘Abbasid variety. But no matter how astutely we try to access the Umayyad memoriam, it is likely impossible to ever recuperate completely whatever consists of “an authentic manifestation of Umayyad Bedouin society.”

This call to distinguish between things Umayyad and ‘Abbasid – even though it is important to this book to tease out, as much as possible, the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd iterations of the *Majnūn Laylā* love story – this call runs into methodological difficulties as I have discussed elsewhere. The question is not so much “What are the differences and similarities?” but rather “How do we find out the differences and similarities” “between *al-ḥubb al-‘Uḏhrī* as an authentic manifestation of Umayyad Bedouin society and its subsequent transformations in the implied ‘Abbasid-era urban centres of mediaeval Islam?”

In Chapter One, I have already discussed how the discernment of things ‘Umayyad versus ‘Abbāsīd is very tricky because there are major historiographical issues stemming from the crucial question: “How do we know what we think we know about the Umayyads?”²⁰ Discerning this involves an interpretive dance back and forth between the two periodicities that is integral to readings of the romance as it is recorded in the compendium of the *Aghānī*. Methodologically the critic approaching the *Majnūn Laylā* romance recorded in the tenth-century *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, an ‘Abbāsīd compendium, has to pose questions and seek answers about one historical phase through studying another – that is, answers about the elements in the compendium resonant with Umayyad memoria are reached through studying the ‘Abbāsīd phase, as well as vice versa, questions posed and answers about the compendium’s contemporaneous ‘Abbāsīd historical phase are reached through accessing the prior Umayyad era (and also through this the even prior pre-Islamic phases).

Still, it is worthwhile to at least ponder and ask: is there a Bedouin Umayyad (i.e., pre-‘Abbāsīd) “original stratum” to the ‘Uḏhrī love stories, including to specifically the *Aghānī* version of *Majnūn Laylā*? Is it important to distinguish this from the ‘Abbāsīd re-readings of the romance(s)? What impact, if any, did ‘Uḏhrī [Bedouin-type] love poetry – which is said to have come into vogue during the Umayyad period – have on Abbāsīd readings of the romance? Is it true that, unlike the other ‘Uḏhrī poets, Majnūn is more of a semi-historical, legendary character because the transmitted material concerning him is more suspect historically? Does the love story concerning him contains elements and motifs not found in those associated with the other ‘Uḏhrī love poets?

Yet, in the case of the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, Hamori’s assertion about a “core of poetry” and Jacobi’s point about an “authentic ‘Uḏhrī manifestation in Umayyad Bedouin society” may have to be cautiously applied for several reasons laid out by a number of scholars including the Russian scholar Kračkovskij (Ritter translation). In his detailed textual-critical essay on the story, Kračkovskij first states that we are not familiar with any “coherent, narrated narrative [account] about Majnūn in the early [pre-Umayyad or early Umayyad] days; maybe there was one, but it did not come down to us”²¹ and second, that it is vital “to note . . . that Majnūn by no means attained its celebrity status in the category of the love stories to which it is related all at once . . . [V]erse works of the same and the following epoch . . . name the names of proverbially famous lovers. For a long time we do not find Majnūn among them.”²² This suggests that use of the term “core” or an “original stratum” to describe the beginnings of the “Majnūn” romance

should be done with great care – there may never have been a “textual core,” neither in narrative or in verse, but rather this particular love story, with its legendary, semi-fictional character, may have evolved as a construct and idea, that became embellished and filled out with poetry and narrative features over time.

No doubt kernels of socio-historical realities can be discerned behind the themes of indiscretion that play a big role in the 'Uḏhrī romances under consideration. No doubt it is extremely challenging to discern these, because, as Andras Hamori rightly observes, “the poets of 'Uḏhrī love are shadowy characters, their biographies full of conventional narrative motifs. It seems quite impossible to separate history from fiction.”²³ In a sense then, these romances are at least once removed from history. They are so consistently characterized by depictions of “love gone awry” that it is hard to deny complete social dimensions to these portrayals. It is difficult to resist the attempt to plumb and analyze these possible socio-historical aspects.

Ultimately, my reading of the *Aghānī* rendition of *Majnūn Laylā*, in this book supports the claims of a number of critics who have maintained that the 'Uḏhrī romances are 'Abbāsīd-age literary, entertainment vehicles for conveying and experiencing the nostalgia for and alterity with regard to a romanticized bygone pagan “Bedouin-era.” I set out to do this by paying special attention to the convergence of historical timelines between the popularization of *Majnūn Laylā* story and the Greco-Arabian/Greco-Persian intellectual revolution. Jean-Claude Vadet has argued that the 'Uḏhrī romances are “the romantic creation of the early 'Abbāsīd age, projected backwards in history at a time when biographies of Bedouin poet-lovers were a popular form of entertainment literature in Baghdad.”²⁴ As such, these romances' poems were set to music, and this music and their main literary characters proved to be highly popular and amusing forms of entertainment for imperial court circles in urban Baghdad.²⁵ In other words, just about when “the Bedouin cosmos disappeared” in one form, it reappeared in another for form – it reappeared as an object of wonder, amusement and entertainment. This was when a narrative was popularized during the 'Abbāsīd tenth century – a narrative that rendered prominent the quintessential Bedouin. This sheds light on why accounts and poems of Bedouin poet-lovers constituted such a “big draw” in terms of elite entertainment literature in 'Abbāsīd Baghdad. It sheds light on why 'Abbāsīd male audiences in the tenth century were entertained by and fascinated with a character like Majnūn and with his story, indeed with the 'Uḏhrī romances of lovelorn poets.

In the following, I set forth a rereading of the term 'Uḏhrī (as regards the relevant love stories). In so doing, I seek to depart from a welter of confusion in existing secondary criticism concerning this word and its associated phrases.

Re-readings of 'Uḏhrī themes

Themes in the 'Uḏhrī corpus ultimately concern geography. Jacobi states that the ['Uḏhrā] tribe was located in the northern part of al-Ḥijāz in the region of Wādī 'l-Ḳurā,²⁶ and also remarks “'Uḏhrī love is a favorite theme in classical Arabic

poetry and prose.”²⁷ She points out the geography but she does not comment on the significance of the geography. Indeed, the geographic significance of the little ‘Uḍhrā tribe’s location largely has gone unremarked in scholarly literature. Salma Jayyusī, almost in passing, observes: “the Banī ‘Uḍrāh, the tribe of Jamil who lived in Wadi al-Qurā, a valley in Ḥijāz, between Syria and Medina.”²⁸ The crucial words are “between Syria and Medina.” Geographically, the ‘Uḍhrā tribe was centrally situated between Syria to the North (and Northwest) and the Ḥijāz to the South (i.e., the cities of Mecca and Medina). This geographic location midway between what was the first foundational capital of the Muslim community (i.e., Medina) and what thereafter became the next capital (i.e., Damascus) for the Umayyads corresponds to the ‘Uḍhrā tribe’s pivotal role in being identified with an Umayyad-era love literature that waxes nostalgic for the primacy of the foundational homeland, i.e., the former capital Medina (including the region of the Najd) in the wake of the relocation of the Umayyad capital to Damascus. Noteworthy, too, is this ‘Uḍhrā tribe’s location near the Ghassanids, who were far more Hellenized than the Lakhmids. The Greek influences in their Ghassanid tribal cultures ranged from secular traces such those of hosting Greek singing girls for entertainment to non-secular ones such as the Ghassanids being Monophysite Christians who along with others played a pivotal role in the translation of Greek works into Syriac which then were translated into Arabic.²⁹

As J. Stetkevych has pointed this out, there is a relationship between ‘Uḍhrī love poems and the literary motif of *ḥanīn ilā al-waṭān* or “nostalgic longing, yearning for the homeland.” Beatrice Greundler spells out some of the perceived differences between the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd aspects of this motif of *ḥanīn ilā al-waṭān*. Simply put, she argues that the Umayyad iteration of *ḥanīn* “broadened to include [yearnings for certain] cities . . . [whereas] . . . in the ‘Abbāsīd period . . . *ḥanīn* widened to refer to a whole region. This coincided with the romanticization of the Bedouin, a literary creation of that urban [‘Abbāsīd period].” Not surprisingly, which to some extent also color the differences between the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd versions of ‘Uḍhrī love literature.

Given the aforementioned associations between ‘Uḍhrī love poems and “yearning for homeland, for original home” – I conjecture that the basic Umayyad semantics of the term ‘Uḍhrī have to do with “virginal” in the sense of a life phase (i.e., childhood) and the associations of innocence and purity with that life phase. In understanding the phrase ‘Uḍhrī love, the emphasis ought to be on “pure and original, virginal childhood, young love” and not upon virginity as a physical or social phenomenon. Fundamentally, the idea of ‘Uḍhrī love consists of youthful love – even assuming the ‘Uḍhrī *Majnūn Laylā* to be an ‘Abbāsīd-era construct. To paraphrase Northrop Frye, “there is something like the excessiveness of vitality, of youthful passion,” connected with the ‘Uḍhrī figures and this is critical to the term and its constructs. The application of “virginal” is not so much about the sexual connotations but rather to render prominent the complexities of child or “puppy” love. Such Bedouin child and teen-age characters face external impediments to their love pose, either through their parents or tribal mores or other external factors. What is being flagged is an early “Bedouin, primitively child-like” life

stage or phase with its challenges of love and hence, such stories feature young love, almost, child love and the related poetry in its Umayyad iterations speaks of this kind of plaintive, young love.

One of the biggest and most persistent confusions concerns the application of the concepts of “chastity” and “virginity” as regards this particular romance and by extension, as regards the subgenre to which it belongs. They are not “chaste stories” and they are not about “unrequited love.”³⁰ To compound the confusion, scholars loosely and interchangeably employ the terms virginity and chastity to describe ‘Uḍhrī. This poses a problem in both the language of Arabic and also in other languages, including English. Especially if the Arabic terminology is consulted, the adjective ‘uḍhrī (virginal) is derived from ‘aḍhra (virginity). This is not to be confused with the Arabic word ‘affa or ‘iffa which connotes “chastity.” In the Arabic and English, there are significant semantic differences (not to mention the differences in the contextual usages) between these terms. Simply put, virginity, in its most basic meaning, consists of a bodily or corporeal state that one maintains or alters whereas, chastity pertains to behavior or conduct in one’s life. Chastity could consist of “code of behavior” or “persona and performance” that has an impact on the retaining or relinquishing of virginity but it is not to be confused with virginity per se. Actually, as discussed already, I argue that “chastity” must primarily be viewed in terms of Abbāsīd-era fashionable trends. It cannot be separated from distinctly ‘Abbāsīd-era Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian ideas and subcultures that colored how fashion-conscious male ‘Abbāsīd Muslim masculinities cultivated *ẓarīf* subcultures. It was “fashionable” to be “chaste” and it was “fashionable” in urban Baghdādī milieus to consult and quote ‘Uḍhrī poetry and anecdotes.

Hence, whereas the *Majnūn Laylā* story is deemed to be about “chaste” love, I argue that there is a difference between concepts of “virginity” and “chastity” in the story with implications for everything from chronology and periodization to hermeneutics and interpretation. The later ‘Abbāsīd discourses regarding chastity appropriate things and eventually move the love story toward mystical discourses. More broadly, whereas these ‘Uḍhrī stories are thought to be chaste love stories, I argue that they are actually quite risqué stories that rhetorically play with “virginity” in especially their reception in ‘Abbāsīd contexts. The Bedouin Umayyad-era material regarding virginity appears to flag issues pertaining to courtship, marriage and lineal concerns whereas the later ‘Abbāsīd-era discourses transition to replace the vocabulary of virginity with that of chastity in terms of fashionable, courtly performances. This latter nudges the story toward courtly and mystical intersections.

Therefore, among the inquiries I address are: What kind of relation existed between the Arabic *Majnūn Laylā* in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (*Book of Songs*) and the ideas of the Muslim mystics on divine love? And likewise, as Lois Giffen wonders, what relations existed between the theory of profane love and the ideas of the Muslim mystics on divine love?³¹ Indeed, how did the Arabic *Majnūn Laylā* in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (*Book of Songs*) play a role in the passage of Arabic love literatures into the discourses of Islamic mysticism (including later Persian and

Turkish forms of mysticism)? Moreover, were subsequent Persian and Turkish iterations of this very romance proof of the success of this passage? I argue that the Arabic *Majnūn Laylā* in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, including the 'Uḍhrī romances, evoke and creatively play with the two binaries of 'aḍhra (virginity) – 'iffa (chastity) and ḥubb (love) – 'ishq (eros). Just as 'ishq (eros) became a central term in Islamic mysticism, likewise, and along with it, so does the concept of 'iffa or chastity.

'Uḍhrī literature and its relation with the meta-discourse on love, i.e., the love treatises³²

As remarked earlier, early Arabic love literature divides into two intersecting broad classes: (1) what we may term the “imaginative” literature on love (including poetry, anecdotes/narrative units or stories)³³ and (2) what may be the expository literature or discourse on love which often cites from or refers to the first class. A strong intertextual dimension between these two categories develops during the 'Abbāsīd period. Importantly, early Arabic love literature correlates with the periodicity of two main eras of early Islamic history:³⁴ the Umayyad Age (circa 660s–750 CE) and the 'Abbāsīd Age (circa 750–1258 CE). Lastly, it should be noted that 'Uḍhrī as a term applies to all of the aforementioned categories, first to poetry and second to prose, and third to the expository love literature's themes and topics.

I mentioned earlier that there exists a strong intertextual dimension between the two categories of the literary discourses on love and the meta-discourse on love. For instance, the love treatises as part of the meta-discourse on love cite and refer to many elements and traditions about 'Uḍhrī lovers.³⁵ Hence, methodologically, these treatises or tracts on love form a kind of meta-discourse for elucidating and deepening the significance of diverse motifs, ideas and features of the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* – especially, since al-Iṣfahānī lived in times when love songs (and the singing girls' milieu that went with it) and the song culture was under threat.

At the outset, it is necessary to comment on the term “expository” and also to state that there exist two constituencies which “author” this expository love literature. It is explanatory or expository in its content because as Lois Giffen notes, “[its] ‘theory’ covers two types of material: (1) Discussion of the essence, nature, names, causes and kinds of love and the differences between them. (2) The [description and analysis of the *ahwal* of the lovers, literally, their ‘circumstances’, a term used by the Arab authors.”³⁶ In terms of chronology, I would concur with Giffen that “the impression one gets from the works on love theory . . . is that, as early as the third [or ninth century], love was a widely discussed topic and that many aspects were considered.”³⁷

To reiterate then, the expository literature on love forms a meta-discourse that is vital for better understanding the 'Uḍhrī love stories, including *Majnūn Laylā* as narrated in the tenth-century *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. More than a century before al-Iṣfahānī lived, there already existed a trajectory of expository love literature

clustered around two constituencies, one of which fully coalesced later in thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Several critics have made observations regarding these two trends. Michael Dols, in his book on Majnūn, offers the following perspectives on “profane love” which he says “when it was excessive, was commonly believed to be a form of madness”:

Profane love was usually considered by Muslim writers from two opposing points of view. The positive view of love (*‘ishq*) saw it as ‘a complex and exceedingly interesting but mysterious human experience’. The negative view of *‘ishq* considered it as a moral/religious issue; *‘ishq* was equated with lust – a vulnerability that was particularly detrimental to Arab male pride – that could easily lead to a tragic end. . . . The negative view of *‘ishq* considered it as a moral/religious issue; *‘ishq* was equated with lust – a vulnerability that was particularly detrimental to Arab male pride – that could easily lead to a tragic end. The lesson was easily demonstrated by literary evidence, such as Majnūn Laylā.

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For the sake of simplicity and clarity, I label these two constituencies “Muslim *‘Ishq*-type (*‘Ishq* or *‘Ishq*, i.e., passionate love) theologians”³⁸ versus “Muslim conservative Ḥanbalī theologians.”³⁹ The Ḥanbalī reference is especially pertinent to the tenth-century ‘Abbāsīd milieu in which al-Ḥafḥānī dwelled and in which he acutely lamented the decline of ‘song and singing girl culture.’⁴⁰ Historically, one key factor in the decline of ‘Abbāsīd caliphal support and patronage for this song culture was the scathing scrutiny to which it was subjected by religious Sunni Ḥanbalī conservatives in Baghdad at that time. It may be reasonable to ask why was the orthodox Ḥanbalī school so interested in passionate love that it produced or authored a trajectory on expository love literature? But this is not anomalous once it is posited (as I do in much of this book) that implied in the ‘Uḏhrī love literature – including in *Majnūn Laylā* – are contesting conceptions about language, as well as profound debates regarding meaning, God, human agency, faith, normativity in ethics and conduct. Hence, it makes sense that the Ḥanbalīs sought to interject themselves and shape these debates. This, along with the Ḥanbalī distaste for and rejection of song culture (which was very much a part of al-Ḥafḥānī’s life and immediate context), sheds light on why some of the best known expository tracts on love are authored by Ḥanbalī theologians and preachers such as the twelfth-century Ibn al-Jawzī.⁴¹ The Ḥanbalī theology of love is profoundly linked with, in the words of Joseph Bell, mainstream “Hanbalism [which] has resolutely and at times courageously defended a strict constructionist interpretation of Islamic orthodoxy.” Bell states: “The forefather and prime authority of the school, Ahmad b. Hanbal (164/780, 241/855), suffered imprisonment and corporal punishment because he refused to sanction the Mu’tazilite doctrine of the created Koran imposed by the humanist caliph al-Ma’mun. In subsequent times Hanbalism continued to oppose, on occasion with violence, Shi’ism, speculative theology, Platonizing mysticism,

and other movements or ideas which it perceived as threats to primitive Islam."⁴² My employing the phraseology of "Muslim conservative Hanbalite theologians" is not out of context given that al-ʿIṣfahānī, during the tenth century, dwelled in a Baghdad embroiled in conflicts with the Ḥanbalīs. Suffice it to note that it is this Ḥanbalī constituency that coalesced later (and by "coalesce" I mean that the expository treatises of its main proponents were produced chronologically later) in time, in part because it reacted to and opposed the prior constituency, which I have labelled as "Muslim 'Ishq-type theologians."⁴³

There exist two main theological (or 'ideological') currents within this expository literature split which differentiated themselves on the basis of which definition or type of love was privileged: the 'Ishq-based love (i.e., passionate love, Eros) or the Ḥanbalī types of love. Hence, in this book, I refer to their practitioners as Muslim 'Ishq-type theologians vs. Muslim Ḥanbalī theologians. I label both these clusters as "Muslim theologians" because they operated within an Islamic context in which what they were writing and how they couched their language and ideas comes closest to a *kalām*-based or theological discourse, irrespective of their particular school of theology, law and/or subject matter.

The Arabic word *'ishq* or *'Ishq* has an incredibly long and rich history in non-Arabic Islamic civilizational discourses (e.g., Turkish, Persian, Urdu) concerning the intersections between love and mysticism. As regards this term, in this book, I largely follow the approach of J. Norment Bell and H. M. al Shafie in their translation of Abū 'l-Hasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Daylamī's recognized treatise on mystical love: "In sections . . . where the words *ḥubb* (or *maḥabba*) and *'ishq* occur together, and especially in more technical passages, we have rendered the former by *love* and the latter by *eros* [or Eros]. The result, admittedly, is not always felicitous. As on other linguistic matters, the Bedouin Arabs were often consulted about the passionate form of love known in Arabic as *'ishq* [or 'Ishq]. The word *eros* because of its Neoplatonic and modern psychoanalytic resonances, is not an entirely suitable translation of *'ishq* in this context. We feel, however, that the advantages of rendering *ḥubb* and *'ishq* more or less consistently by two distinct words in English [parlance] are such that the stylistic problems that result can be tolerated. Where we have wished to specify that the verbal forms in the translation reflect forms of the Arabic verb *'ashīqa*, we have used expressions such as *to love with eros* or *to love passionately*."⁴⁴

One definitive trait of this expository literature on love, in general, but especially of that produced or authored by the "Muslim 'Ishq-type theologians" (such as the ninth-century men of letters and theologians, al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Dāwūd) is what, again, Joseph Bell describes as "its debt to antiquity," specifically its debt to the Greek antiquity which makes the rendering of *'ishq* as *eros* [or Eros] all the more felicitous. As Bell states:

In particular the debt of the expository literature on love in Arabic to antiquity is clear and undeniable. . . . Material of Jewish origin had long been available to the Arabs, both through Koranic restatements and in a large body of inherited Jewish tradition. Greek thought, which for years had been filtering

into the Islamic intellectual milieu, became immediately accessible with the great 'Abbāsīd translation movement of the ninth and tenth centuries. Since most writers on love were not professional philosophers, however, Greek influence reached them rather indirectly, often after considerable distortion of the original ideas. Direct quotations from translated texts are rare in their works, and the numerous acknowledged citations of Greek sages, not always properly ascribed, consist generally of neat aphorisms taken from a common stock of such sayings. Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, and Empedocles are among the authorities most often cited on matters pertaining to love . . . [And a] proportion of the fundamental motifs recurring in Arabic treatises on love, including many typical of imaginative literature, are to be found in the works of Plato and Aristotle or in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁵

This expository discourse on love is heavily informed by and shot through with ideas, concepts and motifs from a kind of synthesis of the legacies of Greek, Jewish, Platonic, Hellenistic, Semitic and other relevant cultural matrices. Likewise, especially the expository trajectory authored by "Muslim *'Ishq*-type theologians," both colored and was colored by the discourses of Islamic theology, mysticism, philosophy, linguistics, as well as ideas regarding early Arabic language, poetics and criticism, including those stemming from pre-Islamic poetry. All this was brimming within the cultural and intellectual environment by about the ninth century, which then, in turn, gave rise to and the flowering of this stream of expository literature concerned with love.

As previously discussed, the Greco-Arabian translation movement initiated an intellectual, philosophical and cultural revolution. It profoundly altered 'Abbāsīd Baghdadī society and beyond. Moreover, the Greco-Arabic translation movement lasted well over two and a half centuries and it was received support from diverse sectors and classes of that society, including first and foremost the patronage of the caliphal rulers. I have mentioned that the Greek contributions to and dimensions of the text and context of the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* are significant and cannot be underestimated. Likewise, the expository texts on love suggest that Greek ideas and concepts were deeply imbibed, researched and synthesized in the Arab cultural milieu in certainly Baghdad and other urban centers.⁴⁶ Bell goes so far as to retail a series of Greek ideas and conceptions of love found in this Arabic expository literature on love. Drawing heavily from Bell's retailing of these ideas, we may delineate a juxtaposition of and even conflict between what may be termed the *'Ishq*-type love (which is quite similar to the 'Uḏhrī love) versus what also may be labelled as a Ḥanbalī orthodox doctrine of love. The first type of love – the Eros or *'Ishq*-type love (which is resonant with strains in 'Uḏhrī love or passion) reflects all of the following:

[F]rom Plato and Aristotle –

the definition of Eros (*'Ishq* among the Arabs) as excessive love or an excess of feeling

(Plato Phaedrus 23738; Laws viii. 837);

58 *On the term 'Uḍhrī and its symbolic universe*

the exclusive character of such excessive love

(Aristotle Ethics ix. 10. 1171a);

the description of love as a divine madness, neither fair nor foul

(Plato Phaedrus 265; Symposium 202);

the ennobling power of love

(Plato Symposium 178)

What I term as the Ḥanbalī theology of love reflects (in their expository literature on the subject), according to Bell, all of the following:

[F]rom the old testament –

love conceived as obedience to the divine law

(Deuteronomy, 4:3740; 6: 5, 1315);

the close association of the love and fear of God

(Deuteronomy, 10:12);

the love sacrifice of Abraham, the “friend” of God

(Genesis 22:119; Isaiah, 41: 8; cf. James 2: 2023);

Joseph in Egypt as the paragon of chastity

(Genesis, 39: 720).

Bell further argues that according to the Eros *'Ishq*-type love: “the distinction between good evil is an illusion and does not exist for the mystic who sees the world from God’s perspective.”⁴⁷ On the other hand, according to the theological Ḥanbalī love, “the distinction between good and evil is objective and should never be neglected, even in the highest stages of the spiritual itinerary.”⁴⁸ Bell comments on this:

Of all these issues it is undoubtedly the last which most nearly epitomizes the conflict the Hanbalite jurists perceived between eros mysticism and orthodoxy. Orthodox Islam, to recall the already familiar, is a legalistic religion which aims at regulating the affairs of the community of believers in this world. Sufism as it appeared to the Hanbalites, however it may have been practiced by its adherents, was essentially an antinomian movement. In its theory it was prone to neglect the concerns of this life and the needs of the natural man. The traditional sanctions against immorality tended to be eroded. The mystic who claimed to see all things in the moment of ecstatic union only as God sees them – as divine acts and therefore good – could justify any unlawful deed on this basis.⁴⁹

In his *Encyclopedia of Islam* essay on *'Ishq*, the critic Mohammed Arkoun makes a crucial observation on the waxing and waning of Greek ideas and how this altered the conception and impact of *'Ishq* or *'ishk*:

With the Ṣūfīs the amorous ardour of 'ishk in spite of some resistance, becomes a part of the life of faith as a natural development of the measured affection (*maḥabba*) mentioned in the Qur'ān (III, 31, XX, 39, etc.). The substitution of 'ishk for *maḥabba* to describe the "essential Desire" for God and the love of God as an essential attribute, which fills the heart of the mystic, seems to have been due to al-Ḥallādj (al-Daylamī, *ʿAtf*, §§ 163–5). Love is no longer merely an expression of gratitude for the blessings of God; it is no longer content with rigorous asceticism and meticulous ritual observance. It becomes an absolute necessity, entailing neither enjoyment nor alleviation, but intensifying as the reciprocity of perspectives between the lover and the Loved comes into effect. This evolution of the pair 'ishk / *maḥabba* is not without echoes of that *erôs* / *agapè*, but in Islam the relationship between the two ideas is complicated by the concurrent development of the "courtly" and mystical tendencies. When contact with Greek texts came to an end, there was a return to a legalistic conception of love in the works of, for example, al-Ḡhazālī or Ibn Taymiyya, or to the exaltation of a perfect and pure Idea in, for example, al-Suhrawardī or even Ibn 'Arabī. Whatever the differences of opinion about its content, 'ishk is one of the characteristics of mediaeval self-awareness, obsessed with the quest for the eternal, the transcendent and the sacred.⁵⁰

There are four or five main names of the historical practitioners and writers of these two expository love trajectories, 'Ishq-based versus Hanbalī-based love. Four out of these five which are linked with the first constituency, i.e., what is being dubbed as the Muslim 'Ishq-type theologians are mentioned and invoked throughout my book. They are al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn Dāwūd, al-Daylamī and Ibn Ḥazm.

The 'Abbāsīd litterateur and theologian, al-Jāḥiẓ (ca. 160/776–255/868 or 869), among other prolific writings, composed two essays or epistles that take up the topic of 'Ishq or the Eros love or passionate. They are *Risālat fī 'l-'Ishq wa l-Nisā* or *Treatise on Passionate Love and Woman* and *Risālat al-Qiyān* or *The Treatise on Singing Girls*.⁵¹ To a degree, al-Jāḥiẓ was critical of the role of Eros or passionate love in the tricks and trades of the class of singing girls who plied their craft (along with their handlers and traffickers) – he viewed their clients (i.e., the ninth-century Bahgdādī aristocracy, male elite audiences) as especially morally corrupt in their succumbing to the destructive forces of a prevalence of 'Ishq or passionate love in their conduct and behavior.⁵² And yet, al-Jāḥiẓ, who was affiliated with the Mu'tazilī theological school which was not unfriendly with Greek influences in Islam, cannot be classed with the Muslim Hanbalī theologians in their categorical condemnation of 'Ishq or Eros-based love.

Another pivotal Muslim 'Ishq-type theologian (associated with the Zāḥirī school of jurisprudence) is Muhammad al-Dāwūd (255/868–297/910), the belles-lettrist writer (poet and anthologist) and theologian who composed the *Kitāb al-Zahra* (*The Book of Flowers*, an anthology of love poetry dated about 890 CE).⁵³ This love treatise analyzed the symptoms, states and causes of love in its first half and thematically anthologized love poetry in its second half. Furthermore, Lois

Giffen observes that Ibn Dāwūd “lived in that time when Arabic literature burst into full flower under the competing influence of Hellenism, Persian tradition, and orthodox reaction against these two. From his aforementioned remarks about those who condemn *hawa* [i.e., destructive, uncontrolled passion, bordering on lust] and from other things which he has to say in his introduction, we know that he is carefully considering what the conservative theologians [again we see how the Hanbalī critiques are being anticipated here . . .] will say when they see his book. As to Hellenism, he is the first of the Arabic writers on love theory (whose work we have) to quote the opinions of Greek thinkers. He cites at length from Plato, Ptolemy, Galen and an unnamed physician, undoubtedly Greek.”⁵⁴

The third name is Abū 'l-Hasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Daylamī who penned a recognized late tenth-century treatise on mystical love, the Arabic title of which is *Kitāb 'atf al-alif al-ma'lūf 'alā al-lām al-ma'tūf* translated as *Book of the Conjunction of the Cherished Alif with the Conjoined Lam*. (d. circa 995–996 or 1001–1002 CE). This treatise is a treatise on mystical love and its big focus is Eros or '*ishq*. Arkoun cites Daylamī's treatise as proof of that replacement by '*ishq* of *ḥubb/maḥabba* to describe the love for God, to describe mystical love. According to Arkoun's interpretation of Daylamī's treatise, this transition from *ḥubb/maḥabba* to '*ishq* is attributed to al-Ḥallāj. Daylamī was a Persian Shi'ite who lived in Shiraz and his shaykh is the most famous mystic of Shiraz: Ibn Khafīf.

The fourth name is that Ibn Ḥazm, theologian, jurist and belles-lettrist writer and poet (384/994–456/1064) in Andalusia who penned the famous love treatise and manual *Tawḥ al-Hamama (The Ring of the Dove)* on love and lovers. It is possible that it had an impact, indirect or direct, on the twelfth-century production of Andreas Cappelanus' love treatise *De Amore* also glossed as *The Art of Courtly Love* which is said to have been written at the behest of the daughter (Marie of Troyes) of Eleanor of Aquitaine. As R. Arnaldez observes in his entry on Ibn Ḥazm, “Ibn Ḥazm had predecessors, the most important of which with al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Dawūd al-Iṣfahānī. His treatise belongs to a literary genre which was to become much favoured, that which may be termed the ‘Code of Love’.”⁵⁵

As for the main Muslim Ḥanbalī theologians, there are two names. The first is al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Barbahārī, a tenth-century Ḥanbalī Muslim theologian born in Baghdad (died 941 CE), who played a pivotal role in fomenting attacks on musical and dance establishments (referenced in Chapter One) in that metropolis. It was he who likewise was responsible for “a number of invasive pogroms and instances of sectarian violence in tenth-century Baghdad so much so that Michael Cook has described al-Barbahārī as a manifest “demagogue.”⁵⁶ For our purposes, the one major name is that of Ibn al-Jawzī: theologian and famous preacher (510/1126–597/1200) in Baghdad, jurisconsult and author of prolific works, but for our purposes, it is his love treatise *Dhamm al-Hawa (Censure of Passion)* which is pertinent here. He was known for “his zeal as a cataloguer of heresies and as a polemicist,”⁵⁷ and Bell notes that his treatise “represents a definitive selection of traditional material to support the Hanbalite doctrine of profane love and the first major analytical treatment of the subject produced by a Hanbalite jurist.”⁵⁸ He also observes that “*Dhamm* is clearly the product of a

characteristically Hanbalite concern with the literature of asceticism and piety, in which love was an inescapable issue.”⁵⁹ The treatise consisted of fifty chapters devoted to various themes ranging from morality, human nature, vices and virtues and concluding with the definitions, causes and forms of passionate love.

Notes

- 1 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. “‘Uḏhrī,” by Renate Jacobi, accessed May 31, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7679.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Here is how Kilpatrick describes al-Majnūn in her “List of Personalities”: Al-Majnūn Qays ibn al-Mulawwah: possibly legendary Bedouin poet of the Banū ‘Uḏhrā, famous for his unhappy love for his cousin Layla and his poems about it. Went mad and died; fl. mid-first/seventh century.”
- 5 *Majnūn Laylā*, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 2: 34.
- 6 I am borrowing some of the phraseology and the conceptual division between these two here from the book by Joseph N. Bell titled *Love Theory in Later Hanbalīte Islam* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1979).
- 7 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. “‘Uḏhrī,” by Renate Jacobi, accessed May 31, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0232.
- 8 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. “‘Ghazal,” by R. Blachère and A. Bausani, accessed June 23, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0232.
- 9 Also, the brigand-poet, I would argue, is in certain ways an ancestor of the ‘Uḏhrī lover-poet. The dialectical nature of the links between *Ṣa‘alīk* poetry and the traditional pre-Islamic ode that Stetkevych identifies, mirrors the relationship of the later ‘Uḏhrī love poetry/romances to this ode. Ibid., 157.
- 10 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. “‘Uḏhrī,” by Renate Jacobi, accessed May 31, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7679.
- 11 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. “‘Umar (b. Abd Allah) b. Abi Rabi ‘a,” by J. E. Montgomery, accessed June 23, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7708.
- 12 Ibid. See again in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, what Blachère states regarding the links between the terms “‘ghazal” and ‘Uḏhrī:

“The origins of ‘Uḏhrī love are nevertheless illuminated with a new clarity by a very elaborate examination of the poetic texts attributed to Ḍjamīl [*q.v.*] or Maḍjnūn [*q.v.*]; this examination must of course be linked with an enquiry into these poets and their ‘Uḏhrī rivals. Here and now it can be postulated that the amatory elegiac poetry of courtly inspiration acquired its character under influences coming from outside the primitive Arab homeland; certain factors are strictly ‘Irākī and to be sought in the preoccupations and tastes of some elements of society in Baṣra, Kūfa or Bagḥdād; others derive from contacts between centres in ‘Irāk and the Ḥiḍjāz; indeed, when in the first quarter of the 2nd/8th century Maḍīna was purified of worldly occupations, singer-composers left to settle in ‘Irāk, carrying with them the spirit which had favoured the flourishing of the Ḥiḍjāz manner; without creating it, this current could not but whet the curiosity of a certain ‘Irākī public regarding the stories which had spread about the elegists of Maḍīna or Mecca.

From the end of the 2nd/8th century and in the following twenty-five years, there developed in Baṣra and Bagḥdād a semi-romantic, semi-historical literature, of which Ibn al-Naḍīm, *Fihrist*, 306, cites several authors, such as Ibn

al-Kalbī, al-Madā'inī, or al-Haytham b. 'Adī; these writings, widely utilized by Abu 'l-Faradj al-Iṣfahānī in his *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, demonstrate that the poet-lovers sometimes underwent a genuine transfiguration, which in certain cases turned real persons like Djamīl into veritable heroes of love. From then on the poetical works collected or mis-attributed under the names of these poet-lovers could not but reflect the psychology of the heroes who figured in the romances or romanticized biographies. Can certain tribal groups of Western Arabia have been familiar in their folklore from the 1st/7th century or even earlier with love stories centred on a more or less legendary personality? It is very possible. In particular it seems that the little tribe of the 'Uḏhrā, which in the 1st/7th century frequented an area extending from the oasis of Taymā' to the Wādī 'l-Kūra (see *Aghānī*³, viii, 123, 126, lines 4–5) prided itself on having produced one of these heroes, the famous Djamīl. The 'Uḏhrā were not, however, the only ones to claim such a title to fame; the Nahd of the same area were equally proud of having given birth to the *sayyid* Ibn 'Adjlān, who later became the hero of a love saga (cf. Ibn Kūṭayba, *Poesis*, 449; *Aghānī*¹, xix, 102–4 and xx, 22; Blachère, *Litt.*, ii, chap. IV, § B). Under the pressure of tribal particularism, other groups seem later to have developed creations of a similar kind in the 'Irākī centres where they had installed themselves; such seems to have been the case with the 'Amir b. Ṣa'ṣa'a and Maḏjnūn, their "fool of love" who became a famous hero through his passion for Laylā."

- 13 Jacobi proclaims the following regarding the 'Uḏhrī material: "One line of development is apparent in the legend of Maḏjnūn and the poetry attributed to him, as also in certain poems by al-'Abbās b. al-Aḥnaf (d. between 188/803 and 195/810), the most "courtly" of 'Abbāsīd poets, who sees himself in the 'Uḏhrī tradition . . . It is also manifest in the verses of al-Ḥallādj (d. 309/922), and other Sūfis, and figures prominently in later Islamic mysticism. The main characteristics of this strand are introspectiveness and total absorption in the object of love. The lover turns away from reality towards an idealised form of his imagination, which occupies his mind to such an extent that even the presence of his real beloved cannot gain his attention. He prefers death to fulfillment . . . The intimate relation of love and death, a further element of this strand, appears to be a genuine continuation of the original concept." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. "'Uḏhrī," by Renate Jacobi, accessed May 31, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7679.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 It is fascinating to ponder the possibility of literary parallels between the characters (and implied parodic elements) of Majnūn and Don Quixote. To my knowledge, this could be a line of inquiry deserving of further investigations.
- 16 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. "'Uḏhrī," by Renate Jacobi, accessed May 31, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7679.
- 17 Willem Raven, *Ibn Dawud al-Isbahani and His Kitāb al-Zahrā* (PhD diss., Netherlands: University of Leiden, 1989), 54.
- 18 See Jean-Claude Vadet, André Miquel, and Percy Kemp, *Majnūn et Laylā: l'Amour Fou* (Paris: Editions Sindbad, 1984); Maria Menocal, *Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); Ferial Ghazoul, *The Lyrical Phenomenon* (Cairo, Egypt: Dept. of English and Comparative Literature, the American University in Cairo and the American University in Cairo Press, 2001); among others.
- 19 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. "'Uḏhrī," by Renate Jacobi, accessed May 31, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7679.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 "Eine zusammenhängende, formulierte erzählung über Macnūn kennen wir in der frühzeit nicht; vielleicht hat es eine solche gegeben, ist aber nicht auf uns gekommen." I. J. Krakovskij, "Die frühgeschichte der erzählung von Macnūn und Laila in der arabischen literature," trans. H. Ritter, *Oriens VUI* (1955): 24.

- 22 "Den ersten hinweis liefert uns der umstand, dass Macnūn keineswegs auf einmal seine berühmtheit in der gruppe der ihm verwandten liebespaare erlangt hat. Zur bestätigung dessen verfügen wir über sehr gutes material, nämlich die verse von dichter der gleichen und der folgenden epoche, in denen diese im zusammenhäng mit ihrem thema die namen berühmter liebender nennen, die sprichwörtlich geworden sind. Lange zeit finden wir unter ihnen Macnūn nicht." Ibid., 33.
- 23 A. Hamori, "Love Poetry (*ghazal*)," in *Abbāsīd Belles-Lettres*, The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, eds. Julia Ashtiany, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 205.
- 24 This is a quote from Hamori who quotes Vadet. Ibid.
- 25 Critics who comment on its chronology as being thus are among others: J. C. Vadet, Krack/Ritter, Andras Hamori, Renati Jacobi, J Stetkevych, Michael Dols. But a note regarding J Stetkevych: It is questionable that Stetkevych only uses A. Sattar's edition of the *diwan*. He thus may be relying on verses dating from a time much later than the Umayyad period to argue for changes he claims occurred in the Umayyad period. Using the *Aghānī* version would have at least delimited his material to the tenth century.) Also: Tahar Labib Djedadi, relying on Marxist theory, has argued that these stories can be considered a literary expression of the "Uḏhrī tribe's resistance to economic and social marginalization experienced in the Umayyad period. Tahar Labib Djedadi, *La poésie amoureuse des Arabes: Le cas des 'Udrites. Contribution, à une sociologie de la littérature arabe* (Algeria: SNED, 1974).
- 26 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. "'Uḏhrī," by Renate Jacobi, accessed May 31, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_7679.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Len Goodman, "The Greek Impact on Arabic Literature," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, Cambridge History of Arabic Literature I, ed. A. F. L. Beeston, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 30 If one googles 'Uḏhrī poetry, this passage in *A Poet's Glossary* (Edward Hirsch) is typical of the confusions and misconceptions characterizing the explanations of this kind of poetry and stories: "'Uḏhrī poetry is elegiac love poetry or poetry of unrequited love. This type of lovesick pre-Islamic poetry is named after two poets of the Yemni Banū 'Uḏhrā . . . The most famous of 'Uḏhrī poets, Qays ibn al-Mulawwa, became known by the epithet Majnūn Laylā, 'Mad for Layla.' The 'Uḏhrī poets and their inspirations . . . were transformed into legendary, widely circulated romantic stories of doomed lovers. The three conventions of love poetry are devotion to a single woman, chastity, and faithfulness unto death. The Sufi poets developed the feelings of 'Uḏhrī poetry into a religious devotion to the beloved. The tradition of martyred, unattainable love was also developed into religious verse by medieval Arabic-Islamic and Hebrew poets" (661–662). Such confusions abound in the scholarly criticism as well.
- 31 Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 137.
- 32 As noted, my use of the phrase "expository literature on love" draws upon the division thus set up in Joseph N. Bell's vital book *Love Theory in Later Hanbalīte Islam*; both, this book and the earlier work by Lois Giffen inform much of my writing in this section.
- 33 I am borrowing some of the phraseology and the conceptual division between these two here from the book by Joseph N. Bell titled *Love Theory in Later Hanbalīte Islam*.
- 34 There are two additional prior time periods of significance here: that of the pre-Islamic era (or *ʿAsr al-Jahiliyya* glossed as 'Age of Ignorance or Unrestraint' 400s–500s) and that concerning prophet Muhammad and the first four caliphs (spanning circa 610–660s).
- 35 Bell argues, like some other scholars, "that [such] traditions about "Uḏhrī lovers reported in these expository treatises reflect intellectual trends of later periods [and by later he means from approximately thirteenth through to the sixteenth centuries]" – he means by this the Hanbalīte expository treatises, but this does not change the fact that

- these “intellectual/[theological] trends” were already “in the air” during the lifetime of al-Ḥafḥānī – he was witnessing the impact of the Hanbalītes in Baghdad. Bell, *Love Theory*, 10–13.
- 36 Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, xv. Elsewhere, she notes that this group of works has a “unity” in terms of genre and a “continuity” in “its main lines of development in form and content from the third/ninth century to the eleventh/seventeenth century.” Ibid., xvii.
- 37 Ibid., 143.
- 38 ‘Ishq theologians were often of Zāhirī and/or Mut‘azilī theological backgrounds. The literature on ‘Ishq is sizable. See how Michael Dols also references two cultural cliques (primarily in Baghdad), one described as “genteel savants” and the other as “permissive Sufis”: “The intention of most these writers was to define what was acceptable behavior according to scripture and to combat the perceived permissiveness of the sufis on the one hand and the genteel savants on the other hand.” Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 314. Renate Jacobi also identifies these two trends in her work. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. “‘Uḏhrī,” by Renate Jacobi, accessed May 31, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_7679.
- 39 Hanbalī theologians were of mainstream Sunni ‘Asha‘ari-inflected theological backgrounds. Bell, *Love Theory*, 10–13.
- 40 It is interesting that at least three authors wrote books titled *Kitāb al-Qiyān* (The Book of Singing Girls); they are al-Jāhīz and al-Sarakhsi (both of the eighth century) and also al-Washsha (ninth century). According to Kilpatrick, perhaps al-Ḥafḥānī wrote one as well (pg. 25), but the culture of singing girls were very much a part of al-Ḥafḥānī’s ethos – though a fast-fading ethos.
- 41 Joseph N. Bell correctly identifies the perception of this anomaly: “In some Arab countries today to dub a person a Hanbalīte is to charge him, at the very least, with a certain rigidity of thought and conduct. It is often asked jokingly how it is that the Hanbalītes should have been interested in love. This popular image is undoubtedly somewhat unfair, but it did not develop in a vacuum. From the beginning the mainstream of Hanbalism has resolutely and at times courageously defended a strict constructionist interpretation of Islamic orthodoxy. The forefather and prime authority of the school, Ahmad b. Hanbal (164/780–241/855), suffered imprisonment and corporal punishment because he refused to sanction the Mu‘tazilite doctrine of the created Koran imposed by the humanist caliph al-Ma‘mun.” Bell, *Love Theory*, 1.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 The nomenclature or labeling here does pose a challenge: the relevant scholarly literature (including, for instance, that by L. Giffen) does not consistently and clearly adhere to a set of descriptive/analytical terminologies as regards these two tendencies in the expository love literature. For example, Western critics variously describe this expository literature as “love theory” or “treatises on love” or writings on “profane love.” I have reservations in using the phrase “profane love” for several reasons: what exactly does “profane” means in this context? That, at least implicitly, the thorny issues of the similarities and/or differences between love for a human and love for God are articulated in this expository literature renders problematic the use of the label “profane.”
- 44 Introduction, Abū ‘l-Hasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, trans. Joseph Norment Bell and Hassan Mahmood Abdul Latif Al Shafie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), lxx.
- 45 Bell, *Love Theory*, 4.
- 46 See the point in the Wikipedia entry on “Bayt al-Hikma”: that . . . “this translation movement lent momentum to a great deal of original research occurring in the Islamic world, which had access to texts from Greek, Persian and Indian sources, as opposed to the “Bookshelf Thesis” that reduces the contributions of Islamic scholars to mere translation and preservation of Greek texts.” Wikipedia, s.v. “Bayt al-Hikma,” last modified May 17, 2019, 12:09, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Wisdom.
- 47 Bell, *Love Theory*, 203.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. "Ishk," by Mohammed Arkoun, accessed May 31, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3623.

51 Giffen points out that the latter epistle was instigated by "the attacks of some orthodox Sunnites [most likely Hanbalītes?] whom Jāḥiẓ contemptuously refers to as 'Hashwiya.'" Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, 4.

52 Matthew S. Gordon, "Yearning (jidd) and Disquiet: al-Jāḥiẓ and the Singing Girls," in *Al-Jāḥiẓ: A Muslim Humanist for Our Time*, eds. Amin Heinemen, et al. (Beirut: Orient Institut and Wurzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2009), 260–264.

53 See Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, 12.

54 Ibid., 12–13.

55 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. "Ibn Hazm," by R. Arnaldez, accessed May 31, 2018, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0325.

56 Michael Cook, *Forbidding Wrong in Islam: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 103.

57 *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. "Ibn al-Djawzi," by H Laoust, accessed May 31, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3139.

58 Bell, *Love Theory*, 11.

59 Ibid.

3 The night in the Ghayl – love, meaning and language

In the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*, the expressions and conduct of a central male figure, Majnūn, are exhibited and showcased both within this ‘Abbāsīd-era text and its ‘Abbāsīd reception and performances – indeed, within the reception of this love story across diverse temporal and cultural zones. More than anything else, it is his masculinity that is exhibited and marked for scrutiny. Some questions posed by this love story are: What kind of youth is he? Why does he lose his female beloved? Why does he misbehave in terms of norms of masculine propriety? Could his youthful downfall have been avoided? Why is he unforgettable? The culturally primitivist construction and representation of this male character as recorded in the compiler Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī’s tenth-century *Book of Songs* (i.e., henceforth, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*) present us with the added challenges of discovering the answers to these questions within the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd dimensions and subtexts of the story, and investigating their various forms of interplay. Given the multi-layered texts and contexts of the romance, as discussed in the next chapter, the attempt to reach answers about one historical phase are executed through studying another.

The interconnecting literary motifs of “virginity and love’s revelation” color the entire romance, and yet, they play out in different but intersecting ways through the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd subtexts of the romance. On the one hand, these motifs point to how the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* foregrounds a particular kind of tension enacted in and through the masculinity of Majnūn: a legacy of Bedouin *Jāhiliyya* (pre-Islamic) poetic conventions juxtaposed against rising Umayyad Muslim social conventions. On the other hand, such motifs of love’s revelation, when viewed through an ‘Abbāsīd lens and especially, through ‘Abbāsīd processes of cultural primitivism, demonstrate how the romance becomes a site for both curious scrutiny and entertainment in and through an ironic distance vis-à-vis the Bedouin cosmos: for instance, some of the tensions and conflicts over conceptions of truth, meaning and language that Baghdad experienced during the ‘Abbāsīd and post-‘Abbāsīd time periods, especially in the aftermath of the volatile encounter between Islamic Qur’ān-based ideas and the cultural input from the Greco-Arabian revolution come to the fore in the plots and subplots of the love story. Reactions and counter-reactions to the Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian seismic cultural transformations unfolded throughout nearly the entire

time period of ‘Abbāsids (including the Būyids). Interpretations of the *Majnūn Laylā* romance in conjunction with the historical timeline pertaining to the Greco-Arabian translation movements present a compelling glimpse into and scrutiny of what has been identified as the waning and waxing of the Bedouin cosmos in this book’s beginning.

Love’s revelation

We begin exploring these interconnecting literary motifs of “chastity, virginity, love’s revelation” and their Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd subtexts with a focus upon the gravity of Majnūn’s indiscretion, in the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*, that is, his publicly uttering verses impugning Laylā’s virginity, which causes him to lose her. According to Majnūn’s father:

When the matter between him and her was disclosed, her father was averse to allowing him to marry her since their situation had come out in the open – so he married her to another.

(15)

No other reason is explicitly cited as being the cause for the separation of the lovers except Majnūn’s indiscretion in the *Aghānī*’s version of the romance. Likewise, in the ninth-century *Kitāb al-Shi‘r wal-Shu‘arā* what is indicated is that: “After the relation became known, her father was averse to giving her to him for marriage.”¹

Of what did this indiscretion in poetry consist? What was said, recited and circulated? Was there one set of verses? Many verses? To whom? When did this happen? Where did it occur? Given the gravity of this indiscretion (after all it caused him to lose his beloved!), it is very interesting or perhaps strikingly puzzling that al-Iṣfahānī does not inform his audience of the content of these fateful verses until the very end of the romance. Indeed, it is on the ninety-fourth page of the ninety-four pages in the chapter consisting of the romance of the *Majnūn Laylā* story in the *Aghānī* edition consulted that we get a powerful window into this. Why does al-Iṣfahānī do this? After all, he is the compiler of the love story in the chapter. Is it a matter of design on his part? By placing it at the complete end of the chapter, is he underscoring that this episode is significant or insignificant? Did he do this to allow for the suspense in the romance to continuously mount so as to entertain the reader? Or is it an accident and another reflection of the rather episodic, irregular narrative structure of the romance? Is this yet another element of the almost arbitrary, out-of-order narrative threads of the love story demonstrated? It is difficult to know.

What does become clear from the last page of the romance chapter is that the indiscretion consisted of a pivotal public speech act. The character to disclose this and much more is the victim, Laylā! Certainly up until this final page of the story, it is recognized that Majnūn lost Laylā because of poetry he publicly uttered. It is also recognized while it is not made explicit, (though it is very implicit throughout

the romance) is that these verses were taboo because they impugned his beloved's virginity. But we shall return to this most revealing scene in the *Majnūn Laylā* story in the *Aghānī* shortly.

That it was specifically Laylā's (virginal) purity and innocence that *seem* to have been at stake is apparent from her Bedouin father's summary refusal of Majnūn's marriage proposal after the spread of scandal and his quick acceptance of a proposal from a man from another tribe. Despite desperate attempts on the part of Majnūn's family to persuade him otherwise, he categorically refuses any thought of union between Majnūn and his daughter, citing the stigma his daughter would be branded with as well as his own reputation. In response to their pleas, he exclaims:

[Should I then] disgrace myself and my clan and bring upon myself that which has never befallen anyone of the Arabs and brand my daughter with a shameful stigma [*mīsam faḍīḥa*]!

(21)

The use of the Arabic phrase *mīsam faḍīḥa* is telling. The word *mīsam* means "a physical mark or impress" but it may be used to symbolize a stain or blot on a person's moral character and reputation.

It is noteworthy that Laylā's father expresses as much outrage over the damage to his honor and that of his male kin, as over the reputed loss of his daughter's virginity. This may partly explain why the 'damage-control' undertaken by her father does not involve the marriage of the slanderer to his daughter, for it may be validly asked: why is Majnūn, the slanderer, not permitted to marry the woman he has dishonored and thereby restore her honor? It is likely that the scandal immediately followed by a marriage between the "scandalous and scandalized parties" would have merely confirmed the worst being imagined about them by the public. Hence, the story depicts an attempt by Laylā's father to erase or, at least, mitigate this scandal through the marriage of his daughter to another man. Lila Abū-Lughod's insight into "why kinsmen are more dishonored than the woman herself"² though it is based on the customs of modern Bedouin tribes, also seems to be pertinent to our 'Abbāsīd-context Bedouin romance:

If we understand women's chastity as an aspect of deference, however, we can see how Bedouins interpret infractions as acts of insubordination and insolence. Because men's positions in the hierarchy are validated by the voluntary deference shown them by their dependents, withdrawal of this respect challenges men's authority and undermines their positions.³

Ultimately, Majnūn's indiscretion is perceived by Laylā's father to be more of an affront to his honor than to her honor, and thus, the act of marrying the poet's beloved to another man would seem calculated to primarily control the damage done to his honor through the restoration of Laylā's reputation (i.e., to "prove" her being a virgin).

A true love that does not lie . . . and an echo that resounds

Now there is the need to delve deeper into that most revealing, crucial scene which al-Iṣḫānī saves until the conclusion of the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*. Suffice it to note that at this point in the storyline, Laylā is already married to another man. This scene consists of a visit to Laylā by another Bedouin, ‘Uḍhrī love-poet Qays ibn Dharīḥ. The “visit” is a distinct component of courtship as represented in these Arabic romances – the visit may be undertaken by the lover or the beloved or by the friend or emissary of one of these figures. The lover’s visit to the beloved may carry erotic significance – hence, the “visit” can sometimes incorporate sexual dimensions. It may be inferred thus that a lover’s friend’s visit to the beloved could also be laden with such significance. Hence, the “visit” consists of one of the “signature episodes” of this romance, irrespective of whether the portrayals of the “visit” are of Laylā’s visit to Majnūn, or of his father’s visit to him, or of a fellow poet’s visit to him.

Indeed, in this case, the visit is undertaken by his fellow ‘Uḍhrī poet, Qays ibn Dharīḥ, who at first visits Majnūn, and then the latter asks him to convey his greetings to Laylā. When Qays (whose name should not be confused with that of Majnūn’s tribal name Qays ibn al-Mulawwa) goes to see Laylā and conveys Majnūn’s regards, Laylā bursts out in anger:

If I had known you were his messenger, I would not
have welcomed you! Tell him from me: ‘What
about your saying,
 ‘A Night, in the valley of al-Ghayl, O Umm Mālik,
 Refused
 To give you anything other than [except] a True Love [Ḥubb Ṣādiq]
 that does not lie . . .
 Indeed, you have caused an echo to resound,
 O Umm Mālik
 Which goes wherever the wind takes it.’
Tell me about this night of al-Ghayl, which night
was it? Have I ever been alone with you in the
Ghayl or elsewhere, day or night?’

(94)

There are at least two significant aspects to these verses that caused scandal: first, the implications of a “love that was refused,” and second, the perception that Laylā and Majnūn may have been alone with each other, especially at night. Both aspects are interrelated and important, even though Laylā is shown being angry only about the latter, i.e., the perception that they may have been “alone at night.” It is noteworthy that the verses are addressed to “Umm Mālik” which is the kunya (or pen name) of the beloved Laylā because as shall be seen, both that he identified her by name (even if it is the kunya), and that he used the second-person address all ultimately reinforce the slandering of her reputation. Given that her

name Laylā means “night,” the verses present a clever case of reverse attribution in which the word “night” is instead linked with Majnūn: the word “night” here is personified – “a night refused” to give something to you, O Umm Mālik (here is where the second person address is crucial). In other words, Majnūn, during a night, nobly refused to give to Laylā “anything but a true love that does not lie.”

More than a century after al-İṣḫānī’s ‘Abbāsīd rendition of the Majnūn story, the eleventh-century figure of Ibn Ḥazm, an Andalusī belles-lettrist writer, historian and theologian, offers a description of this “true love that does not lie” in the following quotation from his famous eleventh-century love treatise, *The Ring of the Dove*. Ibn Ḥazm declares that “the only kind of love that lasts [*allatī lā fanā lahā illā bi al-mawt*] is the love of true passion [*maḥabbatul-‘İshq al-ṣaḥīḥ*]. All other kinds of love (for example, love based on kinship, or love resulting from shared ambitions, etc.) fade with the passing away of their causes.” Ibn Ḥazm employs somewhat different terminology (i.e., the terms *‘İshq* and *ṣaḥīḥ*) but he does also use a derivative of the term *ḥubb* – his use of *maḥabbat* shares a common root with *ḥubb* in the poem’s verse (*True Love* or *Ḥubb Ṣādiq*) and most relevant here – this “true love that does not lie” tallies with one of the varieties of love enumerated in his famous handbook on love.⁴ But this verse by Majnūn lent itself to scandalous inferences and interpretations: Just what was ‘refused’? Or what was asked for or invited? Was it something “other than a true love” (which, though, was [nobly] rejected)? In other words, was what was rejected or refused a type of dishonorable love or a ‘less than true love’? And was the refuser Majnūn or even Laylā? All this was more than sufficient to cause scandal.

However, the implication present in the verses, of the lovers having been alone during a night, wreaked havoc on their reputations, especially that of Laylā – and as pointed out before, it is upon this aspect that Laylā focuses during her angry exchange with Qays ibn Dharrīḥ. The second hemistich contains an allusion to the oncoming scandal. The beloved (like the verses about her) has caused an echo to resound and the wind (like gossip) causes the continuing reverberations of the echo; Laylā’s name is everywhere, its echo is to be heard everywhere.

Indisputably, the most immediately damaging consequence of these verses was the impugning of Laylā’s virginity. As is evident from her reaction, the mere hint, in the verses, of her having been alone with Majnūn (not to mention any exchange of intimacy between them) had imperiled her reputation as a virgin. Furthermore, the circulation of these verses reinforced the perception that Laylā’s virginity was no longer above suspicion. Gossip about her was being fueled by the implications of her being alone with Majnūn, especially the implications regarding her ‘purity.’

Is Majnūn’s error then, as Michael Dols broadly words it, his “public display of love, his *tashbīb* – the rhapsodizing about a beloved woman and one’s relationship to her?”⁵ The literary genre term *tashbīb* [rhapsody, serenade of a female beloved] is pivotal here and Dols’ definition is pertinent: “rhapsody [in verse] about a beloved.” Indeed, the Arabic verb of this term is employed by al-İṣḫānī in the preamble to the romance to describe the poetry attributed to Majnūn:

al-Asma’i said: I asked a Bedouin nomad from Banī ‘Āmir ibn Ṣa’ṣa’a about the ‘Āmirite Majnūn, so he said: About which one do you ask me? For there

was a group from us accused of being mad, so which one do you ask about? So I said: The one that used to serenade [*yushabib bi*] Laylā, so he said: All of them used to serenade [*yushabib bi*] Laylā.⁶

We will explore the allusion to multiple “Majnūns” or a “group of the mad ones” in another chapter, but to quote Dols further:

Qays’ [here Qays refers to Majnūn] public expressions about Laylā usurped the traditional Arab right of the families, represented by the fathers, to announce a marriage. Qays’ public display of love, his *tashbīb* – the rhapsodizing about a beloved woman and one’s relationship to her – violated recognized Arab custom. It brought shame and dishonor to Laylā and her family.⁷

If this is the case, *tashbīb* would have to be cited as the cause for the loss of beloveds in all the ‘Uḍhrī love stories because ‘Uḍhrī poetry is nothing if not the performed rhapsody (in verse) of a lover’s relationship to his beloved. All the ‘Uḍhrī poets publicly identified their beloveds and publicly recited verses about their love for these women. In the love story of *Jamīl Buthayna* too, the poet’s *tashbīb* of Buthayna contributes to the demise of the love affair.⁸

Yet, it is not *tashbīb* as mere rhapsody of a beloved that destroys Majnūn but rather *tashbīb* with satirical connotations, for which the literary antecedents are to be found in the pre-Islamic ode or *qaṣīda*, in particular, this ode’s love prelude known as the *nasīb*. Since the lady of the *nasīb* was an object that was both desired and sometimes scorned, elements of *hijā* or satire at times were intertwined with rhapsody in the *nasīb*.⁹ As has been suggested by Jean Claude Vadet, the noted French literary critic, this combination of public praise and blame of women began to sorely try early Umayyad society’s Islamic values concerning female virginity and matrimony.

Vadet has maintained that the conventions of *tashbīb*, as an aspect of the Bedouin conception of *l’amour-folie*, acquired certain negative associations with satire in the later context of Hijāzī poetry of the Umayyad period. During the Umayyad period, “la folie, sans espoir et sans remède . . . parce qu’infligée par une puissance supérieure, licence de propos qui dépasse la mesure et risque d’entraîner un conflit.”¹⁰ At this juncture, “l’amant plaisantim feigne d’être victime du isq,” and *tashbīb* becomes “presque synonyme de satire, hagw,” and thereby, a threat to the honor of the tribe.¹¹

Nous craignons qu’il [le poète] ne dirige ses
satires contre nous on qu’il ne compose sur nos femmes
des poèmes d’amour tasbīb,” disent des Bedouins alarmés
par la passion.¹²

Vadet has written about the intermingling of *hijā*’ with *tashbīb* in the Umayyad context:

When we pass into the Umayyad epoch, *tashbīb* has to be assessed in an urban, city milieu. Let us try to furnish examples of the double-aspect of Bedouin

love in this context: [the first] is madness without hope or remedy which, through a superior power, allows for conventions which transgress bounds and generate conflict. The second . . . aspect mixes with the first such that jesting love pretends to be a victim of *'Ishq. L'amour-folie* about which we have already talked, serves to evoke *l'amour bravade* or *l'amour-boutade* reposing on a great basis of liberty in the values and mores. At this critical instant, *l'amour-boutade* . . . appears to menace the honor of the tribe. Thus *tashbīb* . . . is close to being a synonym of satire. "We believe that he [poet] only directs satire against us and only composes poems of *tashbīb* about our women," say the Bedouins alarmed by the passion. . . . Merely to have frequented a young girl is reason enough for her hand being refused by the family of this latter.¹³

Thus, Majnūn loses Laylā not simply as a result of a "public display of love" but because his *tashbīb* (specifically, his cited verses) revealed a satirical disregard of Islamic social values associated with chastity and matrimony. He loses Laylā because he erred in almost unambiguously publicly risking his beloved's reputation as a virgin – in direct contravention of Umayyad tribal norms linked with young, almost puerile, virginal love, norms that the newly Islamicized Bedouin 'Uḏhrī tribes presumably embraced during the Umayyad period. This indiscretion on the part of Majnūn and its link with the issue of 'virginal love undermined' frames him as the most transgressive of the 'Uḏhrī lovers. This is why Vadet refers to Majnūn as a hero "plus moderne et moins tribal. Magnūn est donc un type, presque un héros à thèse," and why he describes the romance as "*l'adab* contre lui-meme."¹⁴

To speak of matters concerning virginity and sex was not against poetic convention. Certainly, some poetry of 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a, the famous Hijāzī (i.e., of and around the Arabian Hijāz peninsular cities of Mecca and Medina) love poet, born circa 644 CE, contained explicit content about his love affairs. Relevant here is a quotation which describes 'Umar contrasting himself with an 'Uḏhrī friend and saying:

Like myself he was a victim of love and passion for women, but unlike myself he would not secretly enjoy forbidden fruits and easily forget them afterward.¹⁵

Several centuries after the era of 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a, during the 'Abbāsīd period, Arabic literary poetics now influenced to some degree by especially the Greek Aristotelian-based distinctions between form and content, underscored this further: that to speak of matters pertaining to, for example, risqué sexual experiences in poetry was not against literary convention. According to one prominent 'Abbāsīd literary critic, i.e., Qudāma ibn Ja'far, the nature of literary language and its relation to a presumed "real experience" was tenuous at best. What really mattered was the poetic form and style:

But the permissibility for poets to say things at variance with a high moral standard . . . [was] expressly stated by an early writer on poetics. In his *Naqd*

al-Shi'r, Qudāma ibn Ja'far says that a fine love poem does not necessarily imply a poet's personal experience or conviction and he must also not be reproached, if what he says in his poem is morally reprehensible. What is demanded from him is not so much truth and morality as good poetic style and suggestive description.¹⁶

So why is Majnūn punished in our romance for speaking about these things? As I argue, the response to this question has to be conceptualized in and through the consideration of two intersecting eras, Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd. As situated within and viewed from a largely Umayyad lens, it may be that the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* foregrounds a particular kind of tension: a legacy of Bedouin *Jāhiliyya* (pre-Islamic) poetic conventions vs. primarily Umayyad-centered rising Muslim social conventions. What was permissible as poetic convention became impermissible according to rapidly new and prevailing Islamic Umayyad social conventions. In the romance, given its "origins" in possibly a seventh-century Umayyad milieu, the opposition between love and society is actually an opposition between the poetic rhetoric of love relations and the social practices associated with courtship and matrimony in Muslim Umayyad culture. When Majnūn, in the aforementioned culprit verses, invokes a "night" which refused to Laylā "anything but a true love that does not lie," he actually was invoking an existing poetic rhetoric of love relations but a rhetoric that became easily susceptible to misinterpretations given rising social practices associated with female chastity and marriage within especially new and nascent Muslim religio-cultural configurations.

An Umayyad reading: Umayyad Islamic social norms and practices and a "poetics of love"

Again, as situated within and viewed from a largely Umayyad lens, we may ask why Majnūn paradoxically "reveals" a love (that is, hints at intimacy between him and his beloved), knowing that by his doing so, the love relation would be undermined? Why does Majnūn's character thus risk impropriety in his discourse, knowing that thereby he could lose the woman he loved? The critic Alfrayd Farag puts it thus:

Why was Majnūn's character his own worst enemy? Why does Qays publicize his love to the public, when he knows better than anyone that by this Laylā will be distanced from him? Why does Qays become the slanderer of Qays in the public spaces? And his [own] rebuker and killer?¹⁷

Moreover, if we shift our focus from the romance's main character to the corpus to which it belongs, the paradox becomes even more glaring. *Majnūn Laylā* is a romance, belonging to the 'Uḍhrī corpus of love tales famous for their indiscretions in which the female beloved loses her male love relation precisely because of his indiscretion (through his poetry) regarding her purity and virginity and by implication, his own.¹⁸ But this paradox becomes more understandable within the

Umayyad subtext when it is recognized that such norms concerning virginity and marriage are a literary commentary upon the religio-cultural and social strategies of Bedouin 'Uḏhrī tribes to frame themselves as Islamicized during the Umayyad era than upon anything else. This same paradox is compounded even further if we assign credence to the following narrative, transmitted by al-Iṣfahānī in the introduction to the *Majnūn Laylā* romance.

I was told that the story of Majnūn and his poetry were forged by a young man from Banī Umayya who was in love with his paternal cousin. He loathed revealing what was between him and her and so, he fashioned the account of Majnūn, recited the poetry which people relate as Majnūn's and attributed it to him.

(4)

Assuming the credibility of this narrative, we confront the peculiar case of a youth, concerned about discretion in his love affair, producing a poetic persona whose undoing is precisely love's indiscretion. In other words, we have the existence in *Majnūn Laylā* of a remarkable example of a "tale of . . . revealed love," spun by a poet whose concern was not to reveal his love. His revelation, in turn, induces concealment, for the story's dissemination occurs through the device of the pseudonym.

Hence the question of why Majnūn did "speak of his beloved's virginity" when speaking of it implied its transgression and the loss of his beloved draws our attention to an incongruity present not only in the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* but also in the other 'Uḏhrī stories. Publicly recited poetry about intimacy with a beloved came to be rendered socially taboo within the Umayyad context, because, in part as noted, of the unacceptability of this intimacy itself in the new Islamic milieu. Yet, the romance suggests that according to old pre-Islamic Bedouin custom, the rapport between the sexes was relatively unrestricted. This incongruity can be discerned in the following lines related by al-Iṣfahānī:

When Majnūn first fell in love with Laylā, he used to sing her praises [*kathīr al-dhikr*] and visit her at night. The Arabs used to regard as not unacceptable that young men converse with young women. When her family came to know of his love for her, they banned him from visiting her . . .

(43)

As suggested by this narrative, there existed some latitude in visitation and co-mingling between the sexes among the Bedouins during the *Jāhiliyya* or pre-Islamic period. But the public articulation of love in poetry came to be increasingly contested. Was this an instance of Bedouin social custom or practice concerning love increasingly coming to contradict and oppose a Bedouin, pre-Islamic rhetoric on love? The existence in early Bedouin culture of a conception of passionate love as being socially dangerous and shocking along with relatively relaxed practices concerning the interaction between the sexes has been pointed out by the noted French literary critic Jean Claude Vadet in his work on early Arabic literature:

L'amour-passion est chose inconvenante chez les Bédouins, nettement choquante, contraire aux mœurs et, semble-t-il, à la constitution de la société. Il ne saurait en tous cas conduire au mariage. . . . A l'inverse de cette conception, on note une grande familiarité et une rare audace dans les rapports entre les sexes. Il semble que tout soit permis à l'exclusion naturellement du *'išq*, lequel est pur scandale.¹⁹

Vadet suggests that Bedouin society allowed for the representation in the literary realm of what it could not sanction in its social sphere.²⁰ Courtship or *la plai-santerie* between a man and a woman in poetic discourse presented incomparably less danger than its authorization in society. Majnūn's act of indiscretion and the conflict engendered by this act constitutes an opposition between Bedouin poetic conventions of love, on the one hand, and Bedouin as well as – and this is crucial – rising Umayyad Islamic social norms and practices, on the other hand. It is fundamentally an opposition between “poetics of love” and “society.”

Yet, what society deems a transgression, is to the *hero roman* a badge of his passion. Society wants Majnūn to suppress the passion that he, as a lover-poet, must express. Or what he wants to express must be repressed according to the prevailing social norms. For the poet, social mandate or duty becomes a “forbidding” imposition. Torn between duty and desire, between obligation and impulse, Majnūn succumbed to youthful passion knowing well that it would cause him to lose all.

I think that passion [hawa-ha] for her will leave me in a
wilderness, without goods, without a family.
Without anyone to turn to with my last will and
testament.
With only my camel and saddle as friends.
My love for her has eclipsed all previous
affections and taken a place which nothing before had
taken.²¹

(46)

An interpretation that privileges the tragic mode in the romance would argue that Majnūn utters risqué verses about his beloved due to an error in judgment brought about by the rashness and impulsiveness of youthful passion – an error that proves fatal. “Society,” represented in terms of the lovers' kinfolk, especially Laylā's father, views this error as a direct violation or transgression of Umayyad Islamic socio-cultural norms and imperatives.

An ‘Abbāsīd reading: Greco-Arabian debates regarding meaning and language

When we shift to viewing the romance through an ‘Abbāsīd lens, the answer to this question is framed very differently. The questions and answers posed by the

pivotal scene with which this chapter began have to be assessed in and during the aftermath of the historical Greco-Arabian encounter, when the broad cultural infusion and intermix of Greek ideas and worldviews functioned to provoke reactions and counter-reactions. To explore and elucidate this, we again evaluate and analyze what the text relays and quotes as the utterances of both Laylā and Qays ibn Dharīḥ to each other in their heated exchange regarding the fateful verses. In this scene, Qays ibn Dharīḥ has been dispatched by Majnūn to convey his greetings to her. But, again, here is what she declares once he arrives:

“If I had known you were his messenger, I would not have welcomed you!
 Tell him from me: ‘What about your saying,
 ‘A Night, in the valley of al-Ghayl, O Umm Mālik,
 Refused
 To give you anything other than [except] a True Love [Ḥubb Ṣādiq]
 that does not lie . . .
 Indeed, you have caused an echo to resound,
 O Umm Mālik
 Which goes wherever the wind takes it.’
 Tell me about this night of al-Ghayl, which night
 was it? Have I ever been alone with you in the
 Ghayl or elsewhere, day or night?”

(94)

Laylā sends back a message to Majnūn for she commands Qays ibn Dharīḥ “tell him from me,” and her remaining declarations are addressed to Majnūn (in the second person to Majnūn) even while she is in conversation with Qays ibn Dharīḥ. It is a conversation embedded within a conversation. She recites the set of culprit verses even while rendering Majnūn the addressee of these fateful verses during her dialogue with Qays ibn Dharīḥ. Then Laylā demands: “tell me about this night of al-Ghayl, which night was it? Have I ever been alone with you in the Ghayl or elsewhere, day or night?” The “you” in the last question is posed to the absent party, Majnūn, but in and through the interlocutor present, namely, Qays ibn Dharīḥ.

As the emissary of Majnūn, it is Qays ibn Dharīḥ who responds to Laylā. In response to the set of pained and pointed questions by Laylā to Majnūn, Qays tries to defend his fellow poet and console her by asserting:

Indeed, people have interpreted his verses in a manner not intended by him.
 Don’t be like them. He [only] related that he saw you the night of the Ghayl
 Valley and you stole his heart. He did not mean you any harm.

(94)

Qays ibn Dharīḥ suggests that what Majnūn intended to convey by his verses was totally contrary to the public’s interpretation of them. The verb employed for “interpreted” is *ta’awwalū*, which is related to the term *tawīl* or allegorical and/or

metaphorical interpretations (exegesis) of the Qur'ān. Majnūn the poet intended one thing, and his audience, the public did another thing – people misinterpreted his poetry. What he intended to convey was simply that upon merely seeing his beloved during a night in the valley of Ghayl (which the editor of the chapter on *Majnūn Laylā* romance in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* locates as a “name of a valley of the tribe of Ja‘da”), his heart was stolen. What Majnūn intended to convey by his verses, was that for his beloved, he “refused all” (in other words, insisted upon nothing) to his beloved except “a true love that does not lie.” In other words, only the “truest love” was reserved for his beloved.

Yet by introducing into public discourse verses that easily lent themselves to misinterpretation regarding his beloved's chastity, Majnūn gravely impaired her reputation and occasioned his own downfall. What was poetics for him was literalism for his audience. What consisted of imaginative license for the poet becomes a weapon in the hands of the public, and the love story casts the ultimate victim as Laylā or Laylā casts herself as the ultimate victim or both:

So she wept for a while as her tears were flowing, and she was wiping them.
Then she lamented until she almost lost herself, then she said: Send my
cousin my greeting, and tell him: By God, my sorrow for you is more than
you know, but there is no way for me to be with you; Qays went to inform
him of that but he did not find him.

(94)

The love story concludes with these last lines, Laylā saying: “there is no way for me to be with you,” and Qays in search of Majnūn but not finding him.

Why would Iṣfahānī, given that these verses trigger the turning point in the life of the lovers and their story – why would he not inform his audience earlier of the content of these fateful verses? Is it possibly because a late, mature ‘Abbāsīd-centered reading (situated within the Greco-Arabian milieu of a worldview of distance vis-à-vis the Bedouin past, including the Islamic foundational past) is set forth? A reading situated within the Greco-Arabian milieu of a worldview of distance vis-à-vis the Bedouin past, including the Islamic foundational past? A hermeneutics more concerned with issues of meaning, signification, poetics and interpretation in and during a late ‘Abbāsīd phase when the Bedouin past had suddenly become an object of scrutiny and fascination and entertainment?

What Qays ibn Dharrīḥ is shown demonstrating here is nothing short of an ‘Abbāsīd theory of language and poetics in the wake of the Greco-Arabian intellectual revolution – in other words, a theory embracing a multiplicity of distinctions including but not limited to those between textual semantics and (mis) interpretation, text and context, form and meaning as well as between artist and audience. At stake were not just debates about love and sexuality, discretion and indiscretion, but also ‘Abbāsīd-era debates and discussions about meaning, poetics, and literary language after the profound paradigm shift ushered in by the Greco-Arabian transformations wrought in everything from poetics and linguistics to identity and fashion. The ‘Abbāsīd literary critic, i.e., Qudāma ibn Ja‘far,

argued that poets do not have “to mean what they say and say what they mean,” because really “what is demanded from . . . [the poet] is not so much truth and morality as good poetic style and suggestive description.” Hence, Qudāma ibn Ja‘far would argue that the communal misinterpretations of Majnūn’s verses (as evidenced by Majnūn’s own verse “*caused an echo to resound*”) are not the poet’s fault. But in the Arabic Qur’ān, this slipperiness of meaning and interpretation especially characterizing poetry is considered to be a form of deception and thus, the second chapter in the Qur’an, verse 226 declares that “[poets] speak of what they do not do.”²² What the Qur’ān denigrates is the literariness or the non-referential qualities of language. Ultimately, in Islamic society and Islamicized socio-cultural ethos of the ‘Abbāsīd and post-‘Abbāsīd time periods, one could speculate that deep, enduring tensions and conflicts over conceptions of truth, meaning and language came to ultimately imply a Qur’ān-based rejection of Greek-based influences on rhetoric and poetics.

Overpowering passion and the natural disposition of the human soul

Such deep philosophical and theological tensions over conceptions of truth, signification, meaning and language between Qur’ānic norms and Greek-based views and concepts are illustrated in a striking stance adopted by the ‘Abbāsīd Ṣaḥīrī theologian and jurist Ibn Dawūd. Just a century before the *Majnūn Laylā* romance in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, he composed a ninth-century love treatise titled *Kitāb al-Zahrā* (*The Book of the Flower*) characterized by many Greek dimensions. This famous ninth-century love treatise contained a good deal of Greek wisdom traditions. It was a favorite text for the “genteel savants” who were part of *zarīf* society or avant-garde, elegant Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian cliques that, among other things, fashionably wore Greek signet rings in which were inscribed the maxims of Socrates, Plato or Aristotle. They saw it as perhaps their social, etiquette manual and guide.

However, it is puzzling that this theologian and jurist Ibn Dawūd, whose Ṣaḥīrī theological school vehemently rejected concealed or metaphorical meanings in exegesis (i.e., *tawīl* or allegorical and/or metaphorical interpretations of the Qur’ān), embraced in belles-lettrist expression, the use of all sorts of rhetorical devices, including but not limited to verbal allusion, analogy and metaphor, in love poetry. Joseph Bell in his book, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalīte Islam*, recapitulates this anomaly in the following passage that he excerpts:

An example is found in these verses related by Niftawayh from Ibn Dawūd, who is said to have composed them on his death bed:

Why do they blame the blackness in his cheeks
when they do not blame the blossoms on their boughs?
If the flaw of his cheeks is the down of his beard,
then the flaw of his eyes is the fringe of his lashes

On hearing these lines, Niftawayh exclaimed to the jurist: “You reject analogy in jurisprudence [a *Zāhirī* tenet] but affirm it in poetry?!” “Because of overpowering passion and the natural disposition of the human soul,” he replied.²³

Consistent with the religious views as expressed in the *Qur’ān*, Ibn Dawūd rejects the use of tropes in language within the context of scriptural exegeses, but he accepts this over-abundance of literariness in the context of especially love poems and love poetry. This despite the *Qur’ān*’s own proclamation that “[poets] speak of what they do not do,”²⁴ Ibn Dawūd, who like the chronologically later Qudāma ibn Ja‘afar, was receptive to Greek ideas about both language and love, thus, did not appear to insist on poets having ‘to mean what they say and say what they mean.’

This raises many questions as regards our love story: What is the relevance, if any, of theological about scripture and its exegesis, on the one hand, and philosophical poetics of love and literary language on the other hand—all occurring amid and in the wake of the ‘Abbāsīd-era Greco-Arabian intellectual, epistemological and philosophical storms sweeping through Baghdad especially? How do such Greco-Arabian ‘Abbāsīd controversies and debates aid us in interpreting what transpires in the crucial episode consisting of the visit to Laylā by the Bedouin ‘Uḍhrī love-poet Qays ibn Dharrī? How are such ‘Abbāsīd debates and discussions about meaning, poetics, and literary language at stake in this pivotal scene where Qays ibn Dharrī is shown raising crucial questions concerning the dualities (certainly not divorced from Greek concepts of rhetoric and poetics) of textual semantics versus (mis)interpretation, text versus context, form versus content and artist versus audience?

In other words, as situated within and viewed from a largely ‘Abbāsīd lens, the interconnecting literary motifs of “virginity and love’s revelation” prominently featured in the story play out in a different way than in and through the Umayyad lens. According to the ‘Abbāsīd subtext of the romance, we have the philosophical and phenomenological core of issues pertaining to signification, self, affect, language and meaning centered in the love story of *Majnūn Laylā*. We have the core of which is characterized, in R. Howard Bloch’s words, by “a logic of poetry that transgresses what it posits.”²⁵ Bloch, in his book on medieval misogyny, draws attention to a similar paradox as it exists in medieval, courtly French poetry. In a chapter arrestingly titled “The Old French Lay and the Myriad Modes of Male Indiscretion,” he notes:

that love only exists to the degree that it is secret; that secret love only exists to the degree that it is revealed; and revealed, it is no longer love. At the center of the courtly code of discretion and of almost every tale of so-called hidden love lies the logic of the poetry that transgresses what it posits, and not, as has been asserted . . . a conflict of good versus bad lovers.²⁶

Bloch's phrase "the logic of the poetry" suggests that there is something inherent to the suppression of poetic language (secret) that logically entails its expression (revelation). Ibn Dawūd sheds some light on this through the reason he presents for why he embraces tropes in love poetry but not in Qur'ānic exegesis: "Because of overpowering passion and the natural disposition of the human soul."²⁷ Bloch himself seems to point to something akin to this when he asks "does this not mean that there is something specific to the [human] secret that autonomously uncovers . . . that which language, or at least courtly language, cannot hide?"²⁸ He tends toward identification of the paradox mainly on the level of genre (poetry), whereas Ibn Dawūd identifies this paradox in the psychological and philosophical realms of subjectivity and desire. Yet, this paradox is present in the entire Arabo-Islamic discourse on love (and meta-discourse) unfolding during especially the 'Abbāsid period.

Umayyad-Inflected 'Abbāsid constructions of the tragic in the romance

From the perspective of Western literary criticism, an emphasis on virginity is standard in sentimental romance.²⁹ Yet in our romance, the emphasis is not on virginity *per se* but on its challenges and breakdowns, and the fateful consequences this engenders in and through Umayyad-inflected subtexts of this 'Abbāsid-era story. It is this feature, among others, that renders *Majnūn Laylā* a tragic romance – in other words, a romance characterized by a tragic mode.³⁰ According to Northrop Frye:

A romance is normally comic, in the sense that usually the heroine's wiles or whatever are successful and the story ends with marriage or some kind of deliverance. Tragedy or pathos comes from some obstacle or accident which frustrates this conclusion.³¹

To be clear, the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* is not a tragedy *per se* but rather a romance with a tragic and other modes intermixed with pathos.³² Moreover, for this reason and others, the tragic mode or strain within it is not consistently present. Only to a degree is the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* consistent with the conventions of tragic romance: rather than being cyclical, *Majnūn Laylā* reveals a downward movement from the idyllic to the catastrophic and inevitably ends in the separation of the lovers and the eventual death of Majnūn.³³ But it is also the case that this downward movement in the story brings Majnūn, as we shall see, even greater fame as a poet. Furthermore, there are elements (i.e., multiple story lines) found in the romance that suggest that Laylā chose her husband and was not forced into this marriage.

But Laylā does get married to another man, one Ward ibn Thaqīf, and according to one prevailing theme of the romance, it is a coerced marriage and not with the one Laylā loves. Hence, in *Majnūn Laylā*, there is no deliverance as per the tragic

mode. The broken-hearted lover futilely warns his beloved that this marriage will be like a state of widowhood:

Marriage to him is like being a widow and
the lack of him is like being wealthy.

(15)

And, upon hearing of the marriage, he already wishes for the ‘news of the divorce’:

“Subsequently, a bit of this news was related to [Majnūn] – news that he was unable to verify. So he recited: (47)

I prayed a prayer, not unaware . . .

And my Lord is a seer of what is hidden in the breasts

[of human beings]

If you had only presented the coolness of her upper teeth to [one] poorer than me, indeed I am an impoverished one.

The news that she has married has spread,

Will a bearer of good tidings bring to me [news] of her divorce?

This marriage is really the final straw for Majnūn. He loses his mind and withdraws into the wilderness and desert. As‘ad Khairallah has noted “he is the only love-poet [from among the ‘Uḡhrī poets] who is described as actually insane, and who leaves society in order to live and die with the wild animals of the desert.”³⁴ Thus the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* becomes an enactment of his separation from society. He becomes a “wild man” who chooses not to live with human beings nor to converse, behave or dress like them. Occasional attempts by his family and other parties to bridge the chasm between him and society fail. The wild man cannot be redeemed.

Majnūn is irredeemable but paradoxically he continues to produce finer and finer poetry. In fact, *Majnūn Laylā* is arguably a tragic romance in which the hero loses everything but his poetry. Majnūn’s verses are what precipitate loss and yet this loss or defeat only enhances his reputation as a poet. Michael Dols, in his book on insanity in the medieval Islamic world, has raised the issue of “Whether [Majnūn’s] indiscretion was the cause or consequence of his mental disturbance. . . . If Qays’ erotic monomania was a sign of an incipient mental disturbance, his madness gains greater significance in relation to his love and its poetic expression, but it robs the story of much of its romantic impulse. The customary view is that his madness was a consequence of his ardent love.”³⁵

Yet, consistent with the conventions of both the tragic mode in romance and what Northrop Frye calls “tragedy of passion,” Majnūn perceives himself as a victim of the conflict although he is its victim *and* agent.

The tragic hero is normally a person capable of being an agent and not merely a victim of violence, but tragedy is mainly a form in which an actual or potential agent of violence becomes a victim of it.³⁶

Concentration on the pathos of his misfortune, often in the form of blame of others, is a distinct trait of Majnūn's poetry. The following couplet of his is full of pathos and more than a "touch of youthful narcissism":³⁷

A people may be tried but not like my trial
And there exists no lot like my lot in
the misery with you

(65)

He blames many different parties for his plight, including Laylā and divine fate. In this couplet characterized by a plaintive, complaining tone, Majnūn blames God for his fate:

He decreed her for one other than me and so tried
me with love [bi-ḥubb] of her.
Was there not anything else with which to try me other than
Laylā?

(68)

The parties that receive the most blame are his male kin, and Laylā's male kin. In the next chapter, we focus on the constructs of masculinities (including those pertaining to male kin) for understanding the romance.

Notes

- 1 Abū Muhammad Ibn Qutayba, *Al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'arā*, 2 vols, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif bi Misr, 1966), 140.
- 2 Lila Abū-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments, Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 158.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Ṭauq al-Ḥamamah*, ed. al-Ṭāhir Aḥmad Makkī (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1975), 22.
- 5 Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 332.
- 6 Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, Preamble to *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, Vol. 2 (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah al-Misriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1992).
- 7 Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman*, 332.
- 8 *Jamīl Buthayna*, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, comp. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Misriyyah al-'Ammah, 1991), 8: 98–99.
- 9 "The inamorata is often said to belong to an enemy tribe, and thus she serves the double role of a person sought after, but also proudly rejected when her demands grow excessive." A. F. L. Beeston, et al., eds., *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, Cambridge History of Arabic Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 44. Also, "... [Qays al-Ruqayyāt] ... used his great gift for writing love poetry to satirize the Umayyads by writing love songs on their women. As has been mentioned before, this idea was based on a tradition of love satire resorted to in pre-Islamic times" Ibid., 419.
- 10 Jean-Claude Vadet, *L'Esprit Courtois en Orient Dans les Cinq Premiers Siècles de l'Hégire* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1968), 103.

- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid., 103–104.
- 13 Ibid., 104 [quoted previously, translation mine].
- 14 Ibid., 368.
- 15 J. C. Bürgel, “Love, Lust, and Longing: Eroticism in Early Islam as Reflected in Literary Sources,” in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, ed. Afāf Lutfī Al-Sayyid-Marsot (California: Undena Publications, 1979), 84.
- 16 Bürgel, “Love, Lust, and Longing,” 84.
- 17 Alfrayd Farag, *Mu'allafāt Alfrayd Farag* (al-Hay'a al-Misriyah al-'Ammah, 1989), 133.
- 18 In fact, the whole corpus comprises love stories in which poet-lovers fall instantly and passionately in love with women and then, just as quickly, lose them because of their socially unacceptable *tashbīb*.
- 19 Vadet, *L'Esprit Courtois*, 103.
- 20 Car le 'iṣq est une individualisation de l'amour contre laquelle protestent les conceptions tribales pour lesquelles la vraie parenté est collective; par contre le *mizāh* offre infiniment moins de danger parce que, même s'il déclenche un petit incendie sous forme d'un échange de satires, il ne desserre pas l'emprise de la tribu sur l'individu. Ibid.
- 21 Modified version of the author's translation in Alessio Bombaci, *History and Notes in Fuzūlī: Leylā and Mejnūn*, trans. Sofi Huri (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970), 57.
- 22 Qur'ān, 2: 226.
- 23 Joseph N. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalīte Islam* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1979), 27–28.
- 24 Qur'ān, 2: 226.
- 25 R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny & the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 123.
- 26 Ibid., 123.
- 27 Bell, *Love Theory*, 27–28.
- 28 Ibid., 122.
- 29 This is in opposition to medieval courtly romance, in which the focus often is on social taboos surrounding adultery, not virginity.
- 30 Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture, a Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 54.
- 31 Ibid., 92.
- 32 Here I am drawing upon Alastair Fowler's analysis of literary modes versus genres. Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
- 33 Frye maintains that there is a polarization into two worlds, the idyllic and the nightmarish, that is common to romance in general: “. . . most romances exhibit a cyclical movement of descent into a night world and a return to the idyllic world or to some symbol of it like a marriage” Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, 92.
- 34 As'ad Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry: An Interpretation of the Majnūn Legend* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1980), 2.
- 35 Ibid., 332. As pointed out, the manuals on love, such as *Tauq al-Ḥamamah* by Ibn Ḥazm, suggest that *maḥabbat al-'Ishq al-ṣaḥīḥ* or “true love” is susceptible to a form of madness. Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Tauq al-Ḥamamah*, ed. al-Tāhir Ahmad Makkī (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1975), 22. This corroborates the likelihood that his madness was a consequence of his passionate love, not his love a consequence of his madness.
- 36 Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, 66.
- 37 “The quality of music and poetry in [their] speech, the concentration the pathos of [their] fall and a touch of youthful narcissism about [them] render them the victim-figures of the tragedies of passion.” Ibid., Northrop Frye, *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 63.

4 Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd constructs of masculinities in the love story of *Majnūn Laylā*

One compellingly Islamic mode of masculinity consists of “ecstatic *faqīr*” as the most visible expression of the Sufi model. Majnun is among the earliest forerunners of this type. In terms of Islamic Sufi masculinities, one could almost draw a direct line from Majnūn to Ḥallāj to Rumī to Lāl Shahbaz Qalandar, the latter a famed Sufi of the Punjab, sprung from the same soil as the Nooran sisters from the Indian Punjab, who have become a big sensation in South Asia as Sufi Qawwali singers. While watching a 2019 YouTube video of one of their performances, I was struck by how well these young women were performing the “masculinity” associated with this subgenre of music. The Sufi *faqīr* mode of masculinity is a public display of wild, lyrical abandonment replete with facial contortions, passionate emoting, the intimation of ecstatic sensations, gyrations of the head that cause the tumbling of hair, semi-conscious states, and guttural sounds. The Nooran sisters, especially the one embodying *faqīr* maleness, executed the requisite masculinity almost perfectly. “Masculinity appears . . . less stable once what is the most basic assumption about masculinity is stripped away, namely that masculinity belongs to men.”¹ Suffice it to note that this book views masculinity as a kind of performative construct, and a relative construct at that – one dependent upon cross-cultural and cross-temporal differences.² Rather than defining masculinity, it recognizes that, “with innumerable variations in time and in space, masculinity is more complicated than we might first believe and, consequently, cannot be studied under a single definition, but as variety and complexity.”³ Majnūn’s masculinity, almost fifteen-hundred years earlier, constitutes a precursor to that which the Nooran sisters – as women – perform in the twenty-first century in another milieu.

As viewed in and through an ‘Abbāsīd lens, the poet and the patriarch are two basic Bedouin constructs of masculinity with Umayyad subtexts found in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance. The first half of this chapter explores these Umayyad accented constructs, especially in relation to the motif of the romanticized yet strange, exotic Bedouin. But Majnūn’s masculinity is etched in opposition to the socio-cultural contexts of both Umayyad Bedouin and urban settings. In the second half of the chapter, the focus shifts to contemporaneous ‘Abbāsīd constructs of masculinities in the love story. Accessing the romance’s contemporaneous milieu implies its construction through the “memoriam” of a prior Umayyad era (including the “Bedouin cosmos” of an even earlier, pre-Islamic, epoch). Again,

a core methodological premise of this book is that the task of addressing questions and seeking answers about one historical phase is done through the lens of another, i.e. through examining resonances between these historical phases. This ongoing dialogic interpretive dance informs the analysis in this book.

Borrut and Cobb view the Umayyads as “sending an unambiguous message about themselves and where they stood in history. A quick summary of that message would read something like the following: the Umayyads were monotheists, world-conquerors, and, for lack of a better term, Arabian. The Umayyad caliphs were of course God’s caliphs, appointed by Him to steward the community of believers that had submitted to His law. “Islam,” as they called their new creed, was moreover a triumphal creed, one that claimed close familial connections to the other monotheisms of Late Antiquity, even as the Umayyads claimed in their monuments that Islam had supplanted them (most obviously in the Dome of the Rock).”⁴

All three modes of Umayyad self-presentation (as identified by Borrut and Cobb) come into play in the subtexts of “Umayyad memoria” in the *Majnūn Laylā* love story: Islamic monotheism, imperial bureaucracy, and quintessentially Arab, mainly Bedouin. First, Majnūn’s character is constituted in terms of an alternative and/or non-normative masculinity that in one degree or another defies and/or subverts these three modes of Umayyad presentation. What does that mean and how does this happen? Drawing upon pre-Islamic Bedouin norms of the male poet (also the *rāwī* as bard),⁵ Majnūn exemplifies an alternate model of a youthful masculinity whose male prowess and sense of fellowship are based upon mastery of Arabic poetic language and the fame accruing from his poetic sensibilities and his status poetry-master. Hence, Majnūn espouses a masculinity that undermines tribally based Bedouin and urban Umayyad social conventions of dominant Arab male virility and self-control. First, Majnūn eschews being an Umayyad Muslim subject who behaves like a civilized man. Second, Majnūn challenges Arab Bedouin male honor, especially as regards norms and practices of propriety in courtship and marriage. He also challenges Umayyad-era Muslim social norms regarding the same by interlacing his love poetry with risqué satire (i.e., *tashbīb*) which undermines honor and shame codes. Third, Majnūn idealizes a female beloved in place of God, thereby destabilizing Islamic monotheism.

Part I. Umayyad subtexts viewed through ‘Abbāsīd eyes

The fathers & the kinship system

Certainly, according to ‘Abbāsīd readings of alterity and ‘Abbāsīd processes of primitivizing the ‘Udhri model of masculinity, the poet-swain Majnūn challenges meanings assigned to the Arabic gender concept of *murū’a*. The term *murū’a* “describes the sum of the physical qualities of man (*mar*’).”⁶ Two meanings, one concrete and the other abstract, are presented here for this term, and the “first meaning originates in the Djāhiliyya, whilst the second is Islamic.”⁷ The term reveals a “conjunction of two contrary elements: One concrete” – for example,

ownership of wealth and management of property; prowess in battle – “the other abstract and predominating” – for example, fine manners and ethical conduct. “In the latter case, *murū’a* would be identical with good manners: in the former it would take into consideration the material conditions of life.”⁸ As noted, Majnūn espouses a masculinity that goes against tribally based social conventions of male virility and control, especially as regards courtship and marriage. He flaunts violations against Arab Bedouin male honor and propriety as well as against Umayyad Arab Muslim social norms regarding matrimony by combining his love poetry with risqué satire (i.e., *tashbīb* mixed with *hijā’*). Susan Crane’s observation that romance is “the medieval genre in which virginity, courtship, marriage, lineal concerns, primogeniture, and sexual maturation are most fully at issue” is relevant here.⁹

Hence, the ‘Abbāsīd primitivist construction of the alien, somewhat exotic, Bedouin renders a Majnūn who is juxtaposed against an Umayyad Bedouin patriarchy through his violation of basic kinship rules that constitute its social order. He clearly blames the patriarchs and other male kin for the rupture between him and his beloved as well as for his downfall. The Fathers appear to symbolize the norms and rules of primarily an emergent materially oriented Umayyad Bedouin society. This society, according to the poet-lover, is penalizing him for his all-consuming love and passion for a woman. Majnūn perceives himself as unjustly wronged by a prevailing socio-economic system that favors senior males and which victimizes him simply because he is privileging his love for Laylā above the cultural norms that view such a love as unacceptable.

As we shall see, Majnūn’s accusations against Laylā’s folk for marrying her to Ward ibn Thaqīf because of his wealth point to a conflict configured in terms of senior and/or propertied males versus younger and less privileged males. Clearly, Majnūn, as a young male and one with fewer assets than Ward ibn Thaqīf, is at a disadvantage in a social order that he perceives as trafficking in women and approaching marriage as a material transaction. But it is noteworthy that, as Salma Jayyusi has observed, “the whole Umayyad love poetry is anti-social, a criticism of social norms, and an expression of a longing for individual freedom. However, this rejection of society is only partial. In none of these stories do we encounter radical defiance such as an attempt to kill the adversary, or to elope, or, on the part of the girl, a decisive refusal to marry someone else.”¹⁰

It is vital to note that, again, through ‘Abbāsīd primitivist processes of constructing the alien, irrational and somewhat exotic Bedouin, Laylā’s father’s masculinity is depicted in terms of hyperbole – as being overtly centered on Bedouin honor-and-shame codes – and the romance registers the excessiveness of his reactions to what he perceives as Majnūn’s violations. In *Majnūn Laylā*, many narratives depict the feud or conflict as existing essentially between these two men, Laylā’s father and Majnūn.¹¹ Thus, an existing patriarchy is most clearly symbolized in the character of Laylā’s father, who is Majnūn’s *nemesis*, the chief character that obstructs his attainment of the beloved, Laylā. In the narrative concerning a visit paid by Majnūn’s parents and clan elders to Laylā’s father with the aim of persuading the latter to allow the marriage between his daughter and Majnūn, it is

related that her father adamantly refused even to consider the union. He declares that he would divorce his own wife were he compelled to go through with the marriage between his daughter and Majnūn. Majnūn, in his opinion, has brought unparalleled dishonor to his (i.e. Laylā's father's) family name.

The perceived gravity of the young man Majnūn's violation of courtship and matrimonial rituals is evident not only in the intensity of the feud between Majnūn and Laylā's father, but also in the antagonism toward Majnūn expressed by his more immediate tribal male kin ('aṣaba), including his own father. In the following sets of verses, we can quite clearly perceive a tension between allegiance to norms of the "father" versus allegiance to "woman" in the poet-lover.¹²

See how she was secluded and her guard made me take a solemn oath . . . not
to visit her;
And men whose ancestor is my father and her father, and who were exasperated
with me, threatened me in the matter of her. . . .
For no other crime other than that I love her and that my heart is her pawn
and prisoner.

(p. 68)

A repressive senior patriarchy is invoked through the line: "And men whose ancestor is my father and her father, and who were; exasperated with me, threatened me in the matter of her." Two different models of masculinity are juxtaposed: that of the tribal (i.e. honorable ancestral patriarchs) and that of the youthful swaggering teenager who, because he is passionately in love, boldly declares himself "imprisoned" by a beloved.

Actually, the way *Majnūn Laylā* exemplifies this tension between allegiance to norms of the father versus allegiance to youthful love is central to understanding how the romance partakes of the conventions of passion-tragedies.¹³ Moreover, various sets of verses and narratives in this section not only portray how his male kin faulted Majnūn for his love of Laylā, but also underscore the fact that the antagonism between Majnūn and his male tribal society (his male kin group) is mutual. He rejects its Umayyad Bedouin norms regarding social conduct just as much as it ostracizes him for his social transgression. In these verses, both paternal and maternal male kin are invoked (in contrast to the previously quoted poetic lines):

Folk say perhaps Majnūn of 'Āmir wants consolation,
I said: "No way"; My relatives blame in the matter of Laylā,
My brother, paternal cousin, maternal cousin and maternal uncle.
They say Laylā is from enemy folk,
If she is an enemy, she is a dear enemy

(p. 38)

It is noteworthy that Majnūn's kin perceive Laylā's kinfolk and tribe as the enemy. Once again, there are resonances here with the pre-Islamic ode's love prelude, the

nasib, in which the serenaded lady was also often was an inamorata of an enemy tribe. This combination of *tashbīb* (poetic rhapsodizing) and *hijā'* (satire) in the love prelude also colored the Umayyad-era *tashbīb* of Majnūn. In such a combination of rhapsody and satire, both the girl beloved and her kinfolk may be subject to calumny and satire. Yet the poet-lover heralds this enmity as badge of his love for Laylā: “*If she is an enemy, she is a dear enemy.*” Likewise, in the following narrative, we find depictions of Majnūn’s relatives reproaching him, as well as his defiant response to them:

And so, he lost his mind and his folk despaired of him and were anxious about his situation. They united together to confront him and blamed and reproached him for what [a fool] he was making of himself. They said: “What remedy is there for you in this state? Were you to try to forget her, we hope you would be consoled.” Then he confronted his folk and said: “Indeed what’s within me is not easy to bear so diminish your reproaches for I will not listen to them nor will I obey anything anyone says.”

(p. 43)

On the one hand, the extent to which his kinfolk are portrayed as “anxious, despairing, exasperated,” united in their demand that the young Majnūn try to forget Laylā, is striking, while on the other hand, Majnūn demonstrates a surprising stoicism in his position of withstanding the harsh criticism of his kinfolk. In yet another narrative passage:

And his folk were blaming and reproaching him. They heaped reproaches upon him one day so much so that he said:

My good is for one who desires my welfare,
he will hope for it who is shielded from my evil –
one can’t feel safe from my evil.
I don’t share the opinions of one who has bad judgement and
I don’t call “my brother” one who is not obliging to me.

(pp. 42–43)

What is interesting about these verses is that Majnūn alternates between invoking poetic and social conventions – depending on which set is most expedient to his argument.¹⁴ Thus, he invokes the conventions of Bedouin poetic love when he criticizes his male kin for possessing poor judgment (that is, if they don’t know what true love is, they cannot judge him) and being unsympathetic to his interests. After staunchly defending his love for Laylā, he stresses the established Arab tribally based social conventions of *fakhr*, or male pride and courage when he speaks of good (*khayr*) and evil (*sharr*) in these verses, and also when he threatens battle with whomever opposes him. Once he finds himself thrust outside the kin group, he redefines group membership based on his relatives’ attitudes toward him and arrogates to himself the right to decide who will be included and excluded.

Just as Laylā’s father blames Majnūn for violating an Arab tribal code of honor, Majnūn accuses Laylā’s father specifically and her kinfolk of being excessively

materialistic and exploitative – Umayyad subtexts that, again, point toward ‘Abbāsid primitivist processes of sensationalizing and exoticizing. He condemns them for selling their daughter to the highest bidder out of cupidity. In the following set of verses, he denigrates Laylā’s family for seeking to maximize their material gain through the marriage of their daughter:

Look there at Laylā whose halter has been cut off from all except Thaqīf,
They confined her to a fat farm
and sought to gain money through her. May their wealth decrease!

(p. 47)

Laylā’s family is described as being economically disadvantaged as compared to that of Majnūn. Two separate narratives indicate this. First, in an account given by Majnūn’s father, the father observes that “she [Laylā] could not hope for the likes of him [Majnūn].” Second, although Majnūn accuses Laylā’s family of avarice and of marrying her off for money, Laylā’s father is depicted as harshly and categorically refusing an offer from Majnūn’s own family in which they are willing to hand over to him their considerable wealth and property were he to agree to a marriage between his daughter and their son. The latter is related in the anecdote in which a group of elders (including the poet’s father) meet with and try to persuade the beloved’s father.

We beseech you, by God the Merciful, to [marry him to her]. She is not, by God, nobler (*ashraf*) than he. And you do not possess wealth such as that [owned] by his father. He has appointed you the judge in the matter of the *mahr* [dower, bridal price], and if you desire that he dispose of his money [and turn it over] to you, he will do it. [But], he [Laylā’s father] refused and swore that he . . . would never marry her to him.

(p. 21)

In one of the previously cited verses (“They confined her to a ‘fattening farm’ and sought to gain money through her, May their wealth decrease!”), Majnūn suggests that Laylā’s folk are culpable for both coercing her into marriage and for financially exploiting the marital union. Actually, as indicated before, there exists a discrepancy regarding the issue of whether Laylā or her family exercised the power to choose the husband. A narrative or two assigns Laylā this power but several show her kin choosing the wealthy Ward ibn Thaqīf. Most accounts relate that Laylā’s father was clearly the one to refuse Majnūn’s proposal. The anecdote offered here is among the ones that show she was coerced into the marriage to Ward by her family. The passage has an ominous ring to it indicating that Laylā was clearly threatened with punitive measures by her kin should she not acquiesce to their request.

When the matter of Majnūn of Laylā had become public and people were reciting his verses about her, he proposed marriage to her and presented her with fifty red camels and Ward ibn Muhammad al-’Uqaylī proposed

to her, presenting her with ten camels and their shepherd. Then her family announced: "We give her the option to choose between the two of you, she may marry whoever she chooses." [But] they went to her and said: "By God, you had better choose Ward or we will punish you as an example."

(p. 14)

Laylā's husband is usually named Ward ibn Thaqīf, but in this passage, he is referred to as Ward ibn Muhammad al-'Uqaylī (both subtribes of the "Northern Arabs or Qaysites" during the Umayyad era). Publicly, Laylā's kin pretended that the choice of whom she should marry was up to her, but privately they coerced her into marrying Ward because he was wealthier. Perhaps, in accordance with emergent Islamic conjugal practices, her family felt compelled to announce to the suitors that the power to choose belonged to Laylā, when in fact, they exercised this power. Perhaps they did not want Majnūn accusing them of having forced Laylā into marrying Ward (an accusation that the poet-lover did proceed to make). This narrative and others imply that it was because of the greater value of his bride price (due to the inclusion of the shepherd) as compared to that of the bride price or *mahr* of fifty red camels made by Majnūn¹⁵ that she may have been forced by her family to marry Ward. It should be noted, though, that the narrative states the *mahr* offers were presented to her (and not to her father) by the two men – again, a custom more in accordance with marriage practices after the rise of Islam.¹⁶ It could be argued that the romance's portrayal of the *mahr* issue demonstrates that competing yet intersecting parental factors are at play, even assuming that Laylā's folk are shown to have materialistic interests in their daughter's marriage (interests of which Majnūn accuses them).

No doubt something of the extreme and rigid nature of Laylā's father's character comes across in the love story. Two narratives I offered earlier in this chapter demonstrate this – one of which portrays Laylā's father adamantly rejecting an offer of a large sum of money and property made by Majnūn's kin, and another stating that he would go so far as to "separate from or divorce his wife should he be forced to marry his daughter to Majnūn." To one degree or another, certainly, kin/parental pressures are a factor, but the oppressiveness of the character of Laylā's father comes through as the most convincing influence.

Hence, it is not surprising, perhaps, that the romance contains a concluding narrative framing his tyranny of character. After Majnūn's death, a piece of written material is found in his garb containing a bitter couplet in which he curses Laylā's father and invokes upon him the same misery and wretchedness that he has himself had to face in his young life due to the loss of his beloved. Moreover, he assails her father not only for the breakdown of the love affair, but also for the madness that afflicts him after the reversal in the affair.

O Shaykh, one who was not pleased with us. May you
be wretched and not enjoy life's comfort and ease;

May you be miserable just as you made me miserable and
left me to roam with the perishing and not taste sleep.
(p. 92)

There is an obvious animosity toward what can be called the tyranny of patriarchy, as understood through ‘Abbāsid primitivist processes, in *Majnūn Laylā*.¹⁷ The air of oppressiveness and repressiveness, embodied in the figure of Laylā’s father who is addressed as “O shaykh” is linked with this sense of tyranny. Conversely, to paraphrase Northrop Frye, there is something like the excessiveness of vitality, of youthful passion connected with the figure of Majnūn – something of a victim “whose nature is too big for his fortune or of a character of vitality fighting the repressive spheres of patriarchal authority that enfold it.”¹⁸ These two extreme types of masculinity in *Majnūn Laylā* fall outside of what are mainstream normative Umayyad Arab male identities as viewed through an ‘Abbāsid lens.

When we turn to the figure of the husband, again, named Ward ibn Thaqīf, the first and foremost quality associated with him in the romance is wealth. Suffice to say that this Ward is shown proposing to Laylā only when the “matter . . . of Laylā had become public and people were reciting his verses about her.” And he thus proposes to this star beloved, Laylā, presenting her with ten camels and their shepherd and, given the value of the shepherd, his *mahr* or financial “gift” exceeds the value of that offered by Majnūn, and so she marries him.

Upon hearing of the news of her marriage to Ward, Majnūn prays for her divorce:

Subsequently, a bit of this news was related to [Majnūn] – news that he was unable to verify. So he recited:

I prayed a prayer, not unaware . . .
And my Lord is a seer of what is hidden in the breasts [of human beings]
If you had only presented the coolness of her upper teeth
to [one] poorer than me, indeed I am an impoverished one.
The news that she has married has spread,
Will a bearer of good tidings bring to me [news] of her divorce?
(p. 47)

Apposite is the mention that, later in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, when Ward and Laylā are already married, the ancient pre-Islamic term or word *ba ‘al* (the woman’s “lord” or “owner” *ba ‘l*, *ba ‘al*) appears in some satirical verses that smack of extreme impropriety uttered by Majnūn once he hears that Laylā’s husband has cursed him and that he himself has achieved notoriety through Laylā’s name.

If there is among you a lord [*ba ‘al*] of Laylā, it’s me
By the Lord of the Throne, I have kissed her mouth eight times.
(p. 75)

The element of satire or *hijā'* intermixed with *tashbīb* certainly is discernable in both these sets of verses: in the reference to his wanting to hear of her divorce and through Majnūn's pointed reference to an excess of physical intimacy – i.e. he has “kissed her mouth eight times.” In the latter verses, the rebellious and excessive manner in which Majnūn lays claim to being a *ba'al* of Laylā only underscores that he is not her *ba'al*, and that Ward is. Majnūn tries to usurp the position of Laylā's husband by arrogating to himself the latter's conjugal title. More importantly, this excessive behavior of Majnūn emphatically falls outside of the self-definition of Arab and Muslim male identities within Umayyad society, not to mention the contexts linked with the 'Abbāsīd era. Salma Jayyusi has pointed out that this tendency toward extreme satire really came to the fore in the poetry of the Umayyad period – for example, al-Farazdaq and Jarīr, both of whom belonged to the tribe of Tamīm, inaugurated the “longest dispute in Arabic poetry” when Jarīr, “in his satires, insulted the women of the [former's] clan . . . who then appealed to al-Farazdaq to defend their honor.”¹⁹

The aforementioned textual material from the romance also supports Susan Crane's observation that romance is “the medieval genre in which virginity, courtship, marriage, lineal concerns, primogeniture, and sexual maturation are most fully at issue.”²⁰ They also shed light on what Jayyusi says about the “abundance of slave girls in the towns of Hijaz in this [Umayyad] period” even though poets (such as the 'Uḏhrī poets) “for the most part sang of Arab [free] women.”²¹ J. C. Bürgel has also remarked on the fact that in early Arabic literature (pre-Umayyad and Umayyad) “all the great figures of love . . . are couples. Trivial as this statement may seem, it is of high importance within a society accepting polygamy, because it means that despite the permissibility and practice of polygamous relations the idea of true love was, as a rule, associated with a monogamous relation.”²² Does the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* support this assertion that the 'Uḏhrī idealization of a single beloved challenges a patriarchal Umayyad Arab culture in which and the practices of polygamous marriage and concubinage prevailed?

Umayyad rebel poets and a transgressive rhetoric of love relations

Among the Umayyad 'Uḏhrī male community of poets – as constructed in and viewed through an 'Abbāsīd lens – fame is achieved through intimate, transgressive poetry about women. They are poets first and foremost and yet as rebels they spar with what they see as prevailing patriarchal norms that marginalize them within the existing social order. Hence, Majnūn is set up in opposition to the normative practices of an Umayyad cultural order through his invocation of a poetic rhetoric that ostensibly valorizes a single woman as Beloved. Among the 'Uḏhrī poets, a monogamous love appears to be set forth in which “woman” is idealized to the exclusion of all else. Perhaps *Majnūn Laylā* supports the assertions of some literary critics, like Jayyusi, that the 'Uḏhrī idealization of a single beloved should be read as a reaction against patriarchal Umayyad and Abbāsīd Arab cultures which marginalized women as concubines and slave-girls, not to

mention as co-wives in polygamous marriages. Jayyusi has remarked that “the metamorphosis [in the ‘Uḏhrī corpus of romances] of beloved into an ideal of womanhood represents rebellion against polygamous marriage [and the] cult of concubinage . . . in Islam.”²³ Bürgel, too, points out that in pre-Islamic and early Islamic polygamy, “the idea of true love was as a rule associated with a monogamous relation.”²⁴ More accurately, embedded in some of Majnūn’s verses is a critique of marriage as it existed in the Islamic milieu.

Yet, significantly, an ‘Abbāsīd primitivism constructs and canonizes an Umayyad ‘Uḏhrī male community of poets for whom immortality is achieved through poetry, and through transgressive poetry about women at that. That is, we find that a model of masculinity that is based on worshipping the female beloved as an ideal is articulated in and for the sake of an ultimately ‘Abbāsīd-era male rhetoric about love. In *Majnūn Laylā*, claims of allegiance to a woman are ultimately forms of allegiance to male-male relations. Thus, even Majnūn’s youthful obsession with Laylā is really an expression of allegiance to another male institution (that is, the ‘Uḏhrī-style “school” of poetry) *through* a female beloved. As for the polarity of harsh Arab patriarchal/father figure versus non-conformist rebel poet-lover, this is part of a larger tension between the two constructs of masculinities in *Majnūn Laylā* – and in its reception and performative readings by the subsequent ‘Abbāsīd urban culture, both types are represented in an ‘Abbāsīd-era construct of the romanticized yet primitivist Bedouin Arab.

An analysis of gender relations in the story demonstrates that, structurally speaking, two types of male-male bonds characterize it. The first type of male-male relation is established along tribal kinship lines (‘*aṣaba*), but the second type of male-male bond is defined by membership to a community of young poets, that is, the ‘Uḏhrī poets. Just as Majnūn’s main foe is Laylā’s father, not surprisingly his main ally is another ‘Uḏhrī poet-lover – and his namesake – that is, Qays ibn Dharīḥ. This oppositional structure or polarity in the characters surrounding Majnūn is consistent with the “tragic” as identified by Frye, who observes that the tragic hero is surrounded by both a source of *nemesis* and a faithful friend character.²⁵

Of course, the locus for this conflict between the two types of male-male relations is the character of Majnūn. This conflict consists of a violation followed by a rejection, on the part of Majnūn, of the male social bond as defined along Umayyad Arab kinship lines. After the reversal in his love affair, Majnūn’s relations with his male kin are portrayed in very antagonistic terms.

On the other hand, his links with other ‘Uḏhrī poets, in spite (and perhaps because) of his flagrant departure from prevailing social norms, are inscribed in positive terms. Even his rivalry with these poets, as will be shortly discussed, could be construed as another form of male bonding. One could speculate that ultimately he rejects the kinship bond in the interests of consolidating the homo-social ‘Uḏhrī bond.

Next, I briefly review Majnūn’s links with ‘Uḏhrī poets and his ties to fellow male poets in order to eventually underscore the contrast between this and his relations with male kin.

Majnūn and fellow ‘Uḏhrī poets

Majnūn’s affiliation with three famous Umayyad ‘Uḏhrī poets – Qays ibn Dharīḥ, Jamīl, and ‘Urwa – is clearly inscribed in the ‘Abbāsīd-era story, especially in the introductory preamble to the romance in which al-Isfahānī discusses his identity.²⁶

Qays ibn Dharīḥ,²⁷ as faithful friend and rival fellow poet, is aligned with Majnūn at both the beginning and end of al-Isfahānī’s romance chapter on *Majnūn Laylā*. He, in effect, bookends the whole chapter on Majnūn. In the introduction to the story, he is syntactically grouped with Majnūn by the ninth-century ‘Abbāsīd litterateur and theologian al-Jāḥiẓ:

People have not left anonymous poetry said about Laylā without attributing it to Majnūn and verses like it said about Lubnā [beloved of Qays ibn Dharīḥ] without attributing it to Qays ibn Dharīḥ.

(p. 8)

At the end of the romance, Qays is depicted visiting Laylā upon Majnūn’s behest. His fellowship with Majnūn is affirmed in his defense of the latter in the face of the scandal instigated by the verses about Laylā.

More significantly, Qays is shown directly interacting with Majnūn in a captivating narrative. It is mentioned that the two have been longing for and wanting to meet the other, but when they finally encounter one another, it is by chance (pp. 93–94). Upon discovering that the person greeting him is Qays ibn Dharīḥ, Majnūn’s joy is so great that he leaps up and hugs him. What do these two ‘Uḏhrī poets talk about when they meet for the first time? They unburden their hearts and sorrows to each other, that is, they talk about problems in their love affairs and their feelings for their respective beloveds. As sorrowful, melancholic poet-lovers, they have much in common, on the basis of which they bond.

Qays’ verses are also recited in a long and striking anecdote that ends with Majnūn’s death.²⁸ In this narrative, a shaykh or a tribal elder from Murra who wants to meet Majnūn and hear his verses recited is advised by the latter’s transmitter to provoke the poet into responding by declaiming Qays ibn Dharīḥ’s verses (for “he is very fond of him”). The shaykh follows this advice and upon spying Majnūn, approaches him and says: “Qays ibn Dharīḥ spoke well when he said . . .” Majnūn immediately rises to the challenge of competition with another famous poet and, even while expressing his admiration for Qays’ poetry, he does not hesitate to say: “I am still a better poet when I say . . .” This verbal duel of sorts continues for three cycles of exchanges, and in each exchange, Majnūn demonstrates his poetic consciousness by comparing different poems of his own with that of Qays ibn Dharīḥ, concluding in each instance: “And if I am not a better poet in this, then I am a better poet in the following.”²⁹

The performative readings of an ‘Abbāsīd urban culture align Majnūn with two other ‘Uḏhrī poets, namely, Jamīl and ‘Urwa. The link with Jamīl surfaces in two forms: first, in the context of an ‘Abbāsīd literary construct within an Umayyad-era competition between the Northern and Southern tribes, concerning

which of them has produced the most “lovelorn of poet-lovers”; and, second, through a misattribution of authorship (verses linked with Jamīl that turn out to be those of Majnūn).³⁰ Jamīl himself, as indicated by the *Aghānī* rendition of the romance chapter of *Jamīl Buthayna*, had strong bonds with other love poets. This latter romance depicts many scenes in which Jamīl and his transmitter, or *rāwī*, Kuthayyir, as well as the Umayyad *Hijāzi* rakish love poet ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabi’a, are also shown reciting verses to each other, all competing with, and admiring the other. One anecdote describes how Jamīl, upon hearing ‘Umar’s declamations of love verses, is awed and humbled into conceding that he cannot match ‘Umar’s poetic abilities.³¹ Regarding ‘Urwa, the other or third ‘Uḏhrī poet being discussed here, Majnūn himself invokes his tie to this poet through the following verses:

I marvel that the story of ‘Urwa the ‘Uḏhrīte is
 passed from tribe to tribe.
 ‘Urwa died a peaceful death. I, instead, die daily.
 (p. 84)

Again, by describing himself as one who is daily “slain by love,” as opposed to ‘Urwa who died “a peaceful death,” Majnūn implies that he is a nobler warrior in the arena of courtship and love than ‘Urwa.

As fellow ‘Uḏhrī poets, ‘Abbāsīd-era readings with Umayyad subtexts show both Jamīl and Majnūn exhibiting themes of tensions with religion in their poetry. A number of verses attributed to them reveal an incompatibility between love and being a faithful monotheistic believer. This incompatibility, ironically, is most effectively conveyed through an annexation of Islamic phraseology. A. Hamori has stated that “the poaching on religious language, which is in fun in ‘Umar and the poets of his . . . [rakish style], is meant in the ‘Uḏhrī lyric to express the extent of this dangerous devotion [to love]. Thus, for Jamīl, those who die of love are Muslim martyrs, no less than those who fall in the *jihād* (holy war).”³²

They said: Take part in the holy war [jihad], Jamīl, go on a raid!
 But what jihad do I want besides the one that has to do with women?
 Conversation in their company brings joy but each man who dies in their
 midst is a martyr.³³

Northrop Frye’s description of the quest dimension of romance as “the endless adventures and endless sexual stimulation of the wandering of desire” is relevant here,³⁴ as is Patricia Parker’s definition of “‘romance’ as primarily a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective or object.”³⁵ Gustav von Grunebaum has suggested that there may be certain intersections and resonances between the tendency in early Christian martyrology to employ phrases and idioms from the subject of love and the converse pattern occurring in early Islam wherein there is an appropriation of the language of martyrs that then is transferred and applied to the phenomena of love. Here the ‘Uḏhrī poet-lover Jamīl clearly argues against an existing discourse that constructs a normative

Muslim masculinity in terms of the physical prowess and aggression exerted in the numerous Umayyad-era Islamic conquest raids and battles. As regards the aforementioned poetic use of the term *jihād*, Jamāl quite subversively bids for martyrdom by asserting that since he suffers on a battleground where he too is slain – albeit slain by love for women – he also qualifies as a martyr-hero. This model heroism of the ‘Uḏhrī lover is juxtaposed against two religious connotations of *jihād* that prevailed in early Islamic discourses, namely the following: first, according to traditional Islamic normative discourse, for a man to die fighting for the Muslim community or *ummah* was a heroic feat meriting the highest reward; such a feat allowed one a station in heaven. Second, as Joseph N. Bell has pointed out, in a later, perhaps ‘Abbāsīd-inflected, Islamic conception, “Muslim . . . orthodoxy held the real *jihād* to be the *jihād al-naḥs* or the battle against one’s own passions [*naḥs* or the “lower soul/self,” and this came to be especially relevant in Islamic mysticism], not the *jihād* as redefined by a Bedouin poet-lover like Jamāl, who in its view, surrendered to his passions.”³⁶ This ‘Abbāsīd-inflected Islamic conception becomes a gloss on the earlier Umayyad one. For Jamāl, as a legendary lover-poet, the women’s converse, which he frequents and over which he fawns, is portrayed as being dangerously tempting. Just as the Muslim fighter of *jihād* is wounded and killed while defending his community against the corrupt influence of unbelievers, the poet-lover, somewhat farcically, claims that he suffers and dies while defending himself against the fatal attractions of women.

As for Majnūn, in several sets of verses and narratives throughout the *Majnūn Laylā* romance his madness is associated with his disobedience to God. In the following couplet, Majnūn also draws upon an Islamic vocabulary to somewhat ironically convey the incompatibility between religion and love. This is accomplished most effectively through his use of Islamic words such as “[divine] decree, fate” (*qadā*) and “[spiritual] test, trial, affliction” (*ibtīlā*):

Ibn al-Marzubanī informed us, he said: al-Qahdhamī said: When al-Majnūn said:

God decreed her to one other than me and afflicted me with her love.
Why was I not afflicted with a thing other than Laylā?

He lost his mind. The song is for Hakam. . . . And Jahdha informed me of this tradition from Maymūn ibn Harūn who, when he recited this line, he became a leper.

(p. 36)

Due to his disobedience to God, Maymūn ibn Harūn not only loses his mind but also becomes an outcast from society: a leper. In a variant of the aforementioned verses, Majnūn again employs the religious concepts of divine decree, divine judgment, and spiritual trial through an identical use of words such as “decree, fate” (*qadā*) and “test, trial, affliction” (*ibtīlā*):

When Majnūn said:

O Companion, by God, I have no control over that which
God decreed in [the matter of] Layla, and neither over

what he has decreed for me.
 He decreed her for one other than me, and hence, sorely tried me
 in my love for her.
 Is there nothing else other than Layla with which to try and afflict me?
 His reason left him.

(p. 54)

Once more, Majnūn's loss of reason is attributed to divine punishment, both for his excessive love and for questioning and blaming God for his plight.

Multiple Majnūns

Another form of male-male bond between poets is expressed in the narratives about multiple Majnūns competing for the love of Laylā. These narratives also are of two types: first, narratives that allude to the existence of a kind of Umayyad tribal poetic vogue or fad in which numerous poets took on the nickname of Majnūn and second, narratives depicting a love triangle in which one Majnūn's madness is attributed to his hearing verses about Laylā being recited by another Majnūn.

The phenomenon of multiple Majnūns is conveyed by a number of narrative units with distinct 'Abbāsīd-era tendencies of "othering" these Majnūns as part of an exotic and romanticized tribalism associated with the Bedouin cosmos. In one such narrative, a tribesman of the Banū 'Āmir, when asked about Majnūn, responds with the question: "About which of them are you asking me? There were [from] among us a group that went by the name 'Majnūn'" (p. 6). The narrator presses his inquiry, saying he means "the one who loved Laylā" – to which the tribesman retorts that "all were in love with Laylā." The tribesman then quotes verses from the poems of three different Majnūns (plural – *majanīn*). The second type of narrative, depicting love triangles, is exemplified by the following unit:

Mu'ādh ibn Kulayb was crazy and he was in love with Laylā. Sharing in this love for her was Muzāhim ibn al-Hārith al-'Uqaylī. Muzāhim one day said to the mad one:

Both of us, O Mu'ādh, love Laylā – there are traces of her in
 me and in you.
 I am your partner in the passion for one whose tormenting
 love has been your destiny and my destiny.

When he heard these verses, he became mixed up and deranged.

(p. 7)

As I have mentioned earlier, the invocation of bonds with other Umayyad 'Uḍhrī poets, whether by Majnūn or by others on behalf of Majnūn, as well as the phenomena of multiple Majnūns and love triangles, suggest rivalry as well as fellowship. Majnūn's rivalry is apparent in his declarations of superiority to both Qays ibn Dharīḥ and 'Urwa. Likewise, in the love triangles involving two Majnūns,

both are competing for the love of Laylā. Nevertheless, these forms of rivalry could be construed as just another form of male bonding:

Even combat with other men is more comforting and secure than dealing with women. The contrast between male friendship and male rivalry is not absolute and the concept of male bonding encompasses them both. Aggressive relationships are a special case of male bonding because of an intimate involvement with the rival that can have a mirroring effect.³⁷

Among this Umayyad male community of poets, immortality is achieved through poetry about females. More importantly, it is achieved through loss of the females. Majnūn is brought into being as a poet only because he loses Laylā. If she exists at all, it is primarily as a poetic muse and a signifier. In terms of semiotics, the woman exists only through an exchange of rhetoric between male poets. More generally, the male-female relation, that is, the relation between Laylā and Majnūn, is determined only in the context of other male-male relations, be they between poets or between patriarchs or between patriarchs and poets. The lover-poets of the ‘Uḏhrī romances are especially known through speech about their beloveds. For these poets, a woman’s semiotic value resides in poetically transgressing her “secrecy” or her chastity. The male clique of Umayyad poets, constructed and codified in ‘Abbāsīd contexts, attains immortality through its transgressive poetry about females. The heterosexual relation between the beloved and lover is both defined and delimited by the context of this ‘Uḏhrī homosocial bond.

Part II. ‘Abbāsīd readings

Contemporaneous with the ‘Abbāsīd era: multiple representations of masculinities

Multiple ‘Abbāsīd-era textual strains characterize the representations of masculinities in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*’s rendition of the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, and a number of them are shot through with Abbāsīd-era cultural and ethnic dimensions. According to one normative ‘Abbāsīd masculinity, Majnūn is portrayed to possess an irrational, excessively emotional, undisciplined Arab Bedouin masculinity of a sort prone to weeping and swooning. He is the antithesis of the urbane, rational masculinity of the Greco-Arabian scientific and philosophical circles of ‘Abbāsīd Baghdad. According to another mode of normative ‘Abbāsīd masculinity, he is portrayed as sinful, a transgressor of the bounds of acceptable religious conduct and behavior in the eyes of God. In other words, he is the antithesis of the disciplined, orthodox Ḥanbalī masculinity represented in members of that community in ‘Abbāsīd Baghdad. Both these somewhat intersecting modes of normative Abbāsīd modes of masculinities are juxtaposed against and countered by yet another less normative Abbāsīd style of masculinity that romanticizes Majnūn and other legendary lovers as part of their avant-garde, elegant, fashionable, *ẓarīf*

Greco-Persian and Greco-Arabian subcultures. This latter mode dovetails in part with modes of 'Abbāsīd Islamic mystical masculinities. Yet another duality of Abbāsīd masculinities marks off explicit ethnic and cultural dimensions by juxtaposing an exaggerated Persianized masculinity against an equally exaggerated Arabized maleness, and both are parodied: in this duality, Majnūn is represented as a finely dressed and narcissistic Persianized dandy who is outdone by a young, virile Arab goatherd.

We transition now to Majnūn through this 'Abbāsīd lens, which unfolds multiple intersecting complexes regarding the framing of his masculinity.

Sinful transgressive lover vs. noble legendary lover

An 'Abbāsīd orthodox religious strain in the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* repeatedly frames the sinful, wild, and irreligious "nature" of Majnūn. This 'Abbāsīd Islamic strain casts him as an outright sinner and social outcast. In it, he becomes a wild madman and a social pariah because of his transgressions against Islamic divine injunctions.

When Majnūn of Banī 'Āmir said:

He decreed her for one other than me and so tried me with love of her.
Was there not anything else with which to try me other than Laylā?

the night rang with: "You are the one ungrateful of God's decree and rebellious of his commands." Then he went mad and became wild and unsociable. Since that night, he has roamed aimlessly with the beasts [*dhahaba ma' al-wahsh 'ala wajhihi*]. And the qasida (ode) in which this verse is uttered is among the most famous of his poetry.

(p. 68)

The verses, which may be older than the commentary, contain Umayyad subtexts; the comments regarding the verses identifying them as "among the famous of his poetry" would lend credence to this possibility. In this anecdote a direct causal link is posited between what is described as Majnūn's ingratitude and rebelliousness toward God, on the one hand, and his madness and wildness, on the other. Just as Iblis (Satan), who doubted and disobeyed God, was cast out of paradise, likewise Majnūn, who is shown questioning and decrying God's decrees in his verse and, by implication, defying the divine trial to which he has been subjected, is cast out of human society.

In Ibn Qutayba's Abbāsīd-era text of *Majnūn Laylā*, we find the following verses attributed to Majnūn:

At Mecca, by night, the pilgrims prayed to God
beseeching forgiveness for their sins,
While I called: O God, the first thing I ask for myself is Laylā, then be my
reckoner.

If Laylā is given to me in my lifetime, no worshipper's repentance
will be greater than mine.³⁸

Proclaiming his passion for a woman to be on a level more sublime than any allegiance to authority, be it the state or God, Majnūn vows a life of repentance should God grant him Laylā. The next couplet, according to Ibn Qutayba, though falsely attributed, is nonetheless linked with Majnūn in the popular imagination and again reflects his privileging of romantic love over the love of a pious and godly life:

Welcome be the work of Satan,
If my love for her is Satan's work!³⁹

The aforementioned verses contrast romanticize love and passion, and recast conformity to strict Islamic mores as a deviation from the privileging of love. According to this romantic subtext, Majnūn is an ideal lover who heroically pursues the ennobling adventure of courtship and passion.

To further illustrate just how the opposing strains of orthodox, normative Abbāsid Islam versus ennobling romantic love and passion are interwoven into the romance, and to demonstrate how this interweaving characterizes Majnūn as both a legendary romance hero and an insane sinner, I offer the following selection from the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*'s rendition of the *Majnūn Laylā* romance:

When Qays ibn Mulawwah's [Majnūn's] mind became disordered and he abandoned food and drink, his mother betook herself to Laylā and said to her: Indeed, Qays' love for you has robbed him of his senses and he has forsaken sustenance. If you were to go see him . . . I think his sanity would return. Laylā then said: Not during the day, since I do not trust what may happen to me at the hands of my clan, but during the night – [yes]. So she went to him during the night and related to him: "Qays, your mother claims that you went mad because of me and that you have left food and drink. Fear God and have mercy on yourself." He began to weep and then he recited:

She said: 'You have lost your mind over me' I said to her
Love is greater than what [afflicts] the madmen;
One entrusted with love, the one who is a master of love [ṣāhibhu], does not
recover from it for eternity,
Whereas the madman is only felled by it for a time.

Then she wept with him and the two conversed almost until dawn, when she bid him farewell and departed.

(p. 36)

Here, while a normatively traditional Islamic strain depicts Majnūn as a pathetic lunatic, more deserving of pity than admiration, a romanticized subtext, exemplified in the character's own verses, recasts him as a noble and tragic lover whose

trial of passion is eternal. In other words, we have here a cogent example of what Nadia El-Cheikh describes as the dominant 'Abbāsīd imperial culture's reliance upon gender constructs to explain the "uncivilized" nature of other groups. A normative 'Abbāsīd Islamic textual vein in the romance portrays Majnūn as one who has been reduced to being an uncivilized "wild madman" and a "lover" with a frivolous obsession with women. This normative subtext also blames a woman for the lover's breakdown.

Majnūn's own voice argues ironically for a rereading and reclassification of his character-type. In his verses, he casts himself not as a victimized madman, but as the eternally suffering Lover. Thus, an Eros-based romanticized subtext constructs the lover's experience as a heroic feat rather than a breakdown. He is the lover-poet who nobly privileges his passion for a beloved above all else. A lover, Majnūn claims, is a nobler species than a madman and, unlike the latter, a lover desires to be perpetually slain, perpetually felled by passion. True love, in contrast to a crazed infatuation, is romanticized as an affliction from which recovery is not only impossible but undesirable. Thus, Majnūn is dramatized and dramatizes himself as a tragic yet romanticized 'Uḏhrī hero trapped in a conflict between poetic and social conventions, between passion and society.

Irrational primitive Bedouin lover vs. noble, suffering, ẓarīf lover?

According to another dominant contemporaneous 'Abbāsīd masculinity, Majnūn is characterized as an irrational, rough, Bedouin-like masculinity too prone to falling in love, and therefore diseased. Majnūn exhibits the malady and illness of love in his jaundiced complexion, his disorderly affects, including always weeping, screaming, fainting, and roaming. This is countered by a less-normative Abbāsīd mode of masculinity that idealizes and celebrates Majnūn and other 'Uḏhrī-type legendary poet-lovers in terms of their poetic eloquence, devotion and chastity. Via an elegant avant-garde melding of Greco-Persian and Greco-Arabian bohemian subcultures, such Bedouin lovers are romanticized for their poetry and their lyrical personas. A brief comparison of two famous 'Abbāsīd men and their reception of Majnūn illustrates these contrasting masculinities. Ibn Dāwūd (d. 297/910) and al-Rāzī (d. circa 313/925 or 320/932) both lived mostly in Baghdad. Their views on 'Uḏhrī-type love exemplified by the character of Majnūn in the *Aghānī* version of *Majnūn Laylā* could not be more divergent. Ibn Dāwūd was a theologian, poet, and man of letters "who succeeded his father as the leader of the Zahirites" school of law, and also published a well-known anthology of love poetry and a treatise on the subject of love titled *Kitāb al-Zahra*.⁴⁰ As for al-Rāzī, he was a physician and philosopher, who, "having achieved fame in Rayy," near modern Tehran, "returned to Baghdad to become head of its newly founded al-Mu'tadidi hospital, named after [caliph] al-Mu'tadid (who reigned 279–89/892–902)."⁴¹ Both were influenced by Greek thought. Ibn Dāwūd, who was very receptive to Greek ideas concerning love and desire, peppered his treatise with elements of Greek wisdom; for example, such elements "are found in the chapter headings of the [entire] first half of the *al-Zahra*."⁴² "As a philosopher, al-Rāzī was, specifically, a follower

of Socrates; the difference between him and Socrates, he says, was in quantity (*kammiyyah*), not quality (*kafiiyyah*).⁴³ Ibn Dāwūd's famous treatise on love was pivotal in the Greco-Arabian subcultures of the *ẓarīf* (those elegant cutting-edge youth of Baghdad "with fashionable tastes in love poetry, fashion including clothing, food and wine and friends")⁴⁴ who were both inspired and entertained by 'Udhrite love poetry and anecdotes. By contrast, al-Rāzī held the opinion that "ambitious people do not usually fall in love; and if they did, they get over it quickly because it humiliates them – only coarse people like the Bedouin are victims of this malady." Al-Rāzī's remedy for love sickness was to wean oneself away from seeing the beloved, remembering that ultimately death separates all lovers.⁴⁵ Al-Rāzī's urbane, rational masculinity partaking of the Greco-Arabian scientific and philosophical circles of 'Abbāsīd Baghdad sought to primitivize and marginalize the Bedouin 'Uḍhrī-type love exemplified by the character of Majnūn in the *Aghānī* version of *Majnūn Laylā*.

Narcissistic Persian lover-boy vs. virile Bedouin Arab goatherd

As pointed out earlier, the masculinity of Majnūn's character challenges the more or less Umayyad Islamic meanings of *murū'a* – the one concerning owning and managing property and the one having to do with propriety in conduct. But this "lover-boy" masculinity is parodied in yet another instance of 'Abbāsīd imperial culture's reliance upon gender constructs to reinforce its own normative gender categories by articulating the "uncivilized" nature of other groups. In other words, his masculinity is further juxtaposed against 'Abbāsīd-era urban, urbane norms and practices of masculinity through modes of exaggerating and parodying his character.

In an alternate beginning of the romance story, we see Majnūn rendered as an almost ridiculous character, who, even while he dons all the trappings of elegant Persianized Arab 'Abbāsīd *ẓarīf* culture, embodies the exact opposite of good and fine conduct. Majnūn is shown encountering Laylā among a bevy of women as a handsome, wealthy, elegant man (*ẓarīf*), dressed in fine clothes and engaging in fine discourse. But the women's attention suddenly is stolen by the arrival of a rustic, lowly Bedouin youth in Arab garb – whose appearance causes Majnūn to suddenly get angry, recite some disparaging verses, and abruptly leave:

He passed by a woman from his tribe, known as Karīma, and with her was a group of women chattering and among them was Laylā. They [the women] were pleased by his beauty and perfection, so they invited him to dismount and converse. He dismounted and began to talk with them and he ordered a slave of his that was with him to slay for them his [al-Majnūn's] she-camel and he did so. He continued to converse with them for the remainder of the day. While he was so [doing], there appeared before them a young man, wearing a Bedouin garment, who was known as Munāzil, and [who] was driving some of his goats. When they saw him, they drew near to him and abandoned al-Majnūn. Thus, he became angry and departed from them reciting:

Do I slay my she-camel for the sake of Karīma,
 and then find that my arrival paved the way for the arrival of Munāzil?!
 When he arrived, they tinkled their ornaments, yet when I came,
 I was not given the pleasure of those anklets' sound.

(pp. 12–13)

A variant anecdote describes a high-status Majnūn as “*ṣāhib ghazal wa majālasit lil-nisā . . . wa ‘alayhi ḥullatān fakharatān wa-tailasān wa-qalunswa*” (p. 29) – that is, he is set up as an “expert in love poetry and the company of women . . . having donned two luxurious overcoats (a suit of overcoats) and a robe and head cover,” who captures the attention of a bevy of maidens (among them Laylā), only to be suddenly and ridiculously upstaged by a virile, rival male (a young man described as both an “Arab” and a “*ghulām shāb husn al-wajh*,” or “youthful lad of handsome countenance”) with his flock of animals (p. 30). The specific attention that the text pays to clothing, indeed the itemization of attire, deserves further scrutiny. These articles of clothing function as identity markers (identity construed along intersecting cultural, class, and ethnic lines), allowing for the two characters to be clearly outlined and compared. As for Majnūn, he is described as a high-status Persianized *ẓarīf* character through the depiction of his attire. At least four times over a short textual span,⁴⁶ the text explicitly draws attention to the high class status of Majnūn’s apparel – for example, his *ḥullatān*, which was a “suit consisting of two or more garments,” akin today to a “western suit of clothes.” At one point the text refers to this as the *ḥullal al-mulūk* (royal suits or the suit overcoats of rulers).⁴⁷ The mention of the *qalunswa* is another significant ethnic and status marker; it consists of a “distinctive, tall, conical Persian hat,”⁴⁸ which during this time and place (the ninth through tenth centuries of ‘Abbāsīd culture) probably bespoke a “synthesis of Persian and Arab styles.”⁴⁹

When Majnūn is challenged to a wrestling match or duel of sorts by the Bedouin youth, he comes off looking even more ridiculous because he recites verses that show he is more concerned about whether or not the women will see him in this duel than about winning the fight:

The youth said: Come on! Let us duel and engage in a shooting match with each other! [Majnūn] said to him: If you wish that, then move to [a place] where you cannot see them and they cannot see you. Then whatever you wish, do. And he recited:

If we vie in a vacant place, I will overcome him,
 But if he shoots his arrow in front of her,
 then he is the winner over me.

(p. 30)

These somewhat Don Quixote-like antics between the two figures of the elegantly dressed but rude and uncivilized poet-lover, on the one hand, and the rustic, virile and sportsman-like Bedouin lad, on the other, certainly presented an exotic tableau

for the ‘Abbāsīd court-connected society and culture! But this tableau is also functioning to “discursively delineate moral boundaries and consolidate particularities and differences.”⁵⁰ Cultural differences are projected onto these two opposing masculinities and sexualized. We obtain a glimpse into how imperial ‘Abbāsīd court culture – and recall that al-İşfahānī was patronized by the Būyīd court during the tenth century – would be highly entertained by the likes of these two types: a puffed-up dandy fawned over by women, who loves to recite poetry to them while dressed up in elegant garb, but loses out to a younger male who herds animals and dresses like an Arab Bedouin – perhaps uncouth, but manly. Obviously, the Majnūn-type figure is made into a target of amusement both within the story and in terms of the way the story would be received by tenth-century ‘Abbāsīd court-connected circles.

Concluding remarks

The ‘Uḏhrī poet-swain Majnūn composes verses, first and foremost, and, second, is “slain by love” for his lass Laylā. His identity is rooted in his Bedouin origins as young nomadic herder who in his childhood falls in love with a Bedouin shepherdess – a love that flowers in the desert wilderness or the *bādiya* (which shares the root of the word ‘Bedouin’). As exhibited in the ‘Abbāsīd-era love story, several Umayyad-inflected iterations of Majnūn’s masculinity exist, especially as assessed in terms of the story’s turning point, his loss of the beloved Laylā: the young Bedouin ‘Uḏhrī lad falls in love with Laylā, a “cousin-type” childhood sweetheart; the youthful, handsome Bedouin swain who eloquently woos and courts her with his poetry (including some risqué verses); the rebellious young man Majnūn who offers scathing critiques of (Islamic-style ?) marriage in the tribal context once he loses his beloved, and the traumatized renegade Majnūn who, thereupon, cuts himself off from his socio-religious in-group to roam and wander wildly in the desert.

The other core Bedouin construct of masculinity with Umayyad subtexts I have analyzed in this chapter is that of the traditional Arab tribal father or senior patriarch. Represented first and foremost by the tyrannical, excessively honor-bound tribal father of Laylā, this construct also includes other central male kin figures, i.e., Majnūn’s father and kin and also, by implication, Laylā’s rich tribal husband Ward ibn Thaqīf. In actuality, the Abbāsīd-era romanticization of the story features a range of constructions of Umayyad masculinity. These include, but are not limited to, that of the rustic and virile Bedouin goatherd named Munāzil and, importantly, several other prominent ‘Uḏhrī poet-swains.

As demonstrated in this chapter, the contemporaneous ‘Abbāsīd constructs of masculinities in the love story entail the “othering” of this ‘Uḏhrī masculinity in a myriad of intersecting and conflicting ways including the following: Majnūn is romanticized, sexualized, made into a sinner and/or rendered a primitive by the normative models of rational and orthodox religious ‘Abbāsīd Muslim masculinities. El Cheikh insightfully observes that “women and men, gender relations, and sexuality are at the heart of the [‘Abbāsīd] cultural construction of identity, as they are discursively used to fix moral boundaries and consolidate particularities and

differences.”⁵¹ Such an undisciplined and uncivilized male as the ‘Uḏhrī poet-swain Majnūn knows nothing of forbearance and privileges desire over reason and piety. His conduct borders on the absurd; it becomes caricature and shades into the sinful. Not only is he rendered very unlike prevailing ‘Abbāsīd masculinities, he appears to be even unlike that of the pre-Islamic Arab panegyric poet who, though he possesses “no heroic deeds on which to base his own honor, yet [is] indispensable for the process of propagating the honor of heroes.”⁵² The heroism of the ‘Uḏhrī lover is based not on winning battles and slaying others but on being slain by his beloved. As suggested by Mahmoud Manzalaoui, this figure of the “sentimentalized, swooning lover” achieves its fullest expression in the ‘Abbāsīd-era ‘Uḏhrī corpus of Arabic literature.⁵³

Notes

- 1 Todd Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 3.
- 2 Ibid., 2.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 A. Borrut and Paul M. Cobb, Introduction: “Toward a History of Umayyad Legacies,” in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 6.
- 5 And also drawing upon also the Islamic norms of prophecy, i.e., the centrality of language to and its connections with the religion of Islam.
- 6 *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. “murū’a.” H. A. R. Gibb, et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–1980).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4.
- 10 Salma Jayyusi, “Umayyad Poetry,” in *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature I: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, eds. A. F. L. Beeston, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 425.
- 11 In Jamīl’s love story, as depicted in the *Aghānī*, the conflict likewise exists chiefly between him and Buthayna’s father. Jamīl Buthayna, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 8: 99.
- 12 Another way of describing this juxtaposition is that the conflict between masculinity as emulation of the patriarch and masculinity as loving a woman is what the “tragic” turns on in *Majnūn Laylā*. Just as in *Romeo and Juliet* the feud as “conflict between manhood as aggression on behalf of the father, and manhood as loving a woman, is at the bottom of the tragedy, and not to be overcome.” Coppélia Kahn, *Man’s Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 93.
- 13 Northrop Frye associates a conflict between father and son with two kinds of tragedy – the tragedy of order and the tragedy of passion. He observes that the tragedy of order is the fall of the older man, whereas the tragedy of passion is that of the fall of the younger man. The tragedy of passion or the tragedy of youth is one in which “the order-figure is an evil father-figure and the victim is typically a son or daughter in revolt against him.” Frye also suggests that there exists “a parallel between the victim of the passion-tragedy and the rebel of the order-tragedy.” In a passion-tragedy, the failing or vulnerability of the young tragic hero is constructed in terms of his rebelliousness and youthfulness. This youthfulness may take the form of rebellion against the father through obsession with an ideal that competes with that of the paternal one – such as poetic passion for a Beloved as an ideal of womanhood. Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture, a Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 56.

- 14 I am indebted to Devin Stewart for bringing this point to my attention.
- 15 The social inferiority of Laylā's family compared to that of Majnūn is in marked contrast to the example in the love stories of Jamīl and 'Urwa. In these two cases "the physical union between the lovers was prevented by the family of the girl, their motive being . . . the alleged social inferiority of the young man." [emphasis mine]. J. C. Bürgel, "Love, Lust, and Longing: Eroticism in Early Islam as Reflected in Literary Sources," in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, ed. Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid-Marsot (California: Undena Publications, 1979), 93.
- 16 "In these circumstances, it may be realized that the relationship existing between father and daughter . . . was not clearly defined in the early Islamic period . . . This change in the payment of dowry, combined with other decisions of Muhammad, such as that women should be consulted in their choice of husbands, tended to remove control over their affairs from the women's male relatives and vest it in themselves." Ibid., 37–38.
- 17 Northrop Frye, *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 44.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Jayyusi, "Umayyad Poetry," 387–432, 410. Also consult 411 regarding the fact that Jarir composed lots of poems describing Farazdaq's sister having "sensual orgies," etc.
- 20 Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4.
- 21 Ibid., 422. Furthermore, Crane also points to the "double role a city like Medina played as a center at once of singing and religious studies.
- 22 Bürgel, "Love, Lust, and Longing," 112.
- 23 Jayyusi, "Umayyad Poetry," 426.
- 24 Bürgel, "Love, Lust, and Longing," 112.
- 25 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 215.
- 26 In his brief survey of the Arabic material on the romance, Alessio Bombaci observes: "The Bedouin poets are represented in the main by the famous triad: Qays ibn Dharīḥ, 'Urwa ibn Hizām, Jamīl al-'Udhri." Fuzūlī, *Leylā and Mejnūn*, Introduction, History and Notes by Alessio Bombaci, trans. Sofi Huri (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970), 54.
- 27 Clarification: the tribal name of Majnūn, i.e., Qays ibn al-Mulawwah, is not to be confused with the tribal name of Qays ibn Dharīḥ; the former possesses a "pen name" (Majnūn), whereas the latter does not appear to do so.
- 28 Al-Isfahānī, *Majnūn Laylā*, 2: 87–90 and 2: 80–88.
- 29 A. Khairallah also mentions an anecdote from Abū Bakr al-Wālibī's thirteenth century *diwān* on Majnūn in which Majnūn's prominence as a poet is "confirmed by an interesting device, namely that of having another famous love poet admit Majnūn's superiority over him. When asked by the caliph if there is any greater love poet than he, Kutayyir 'Azza admits that Maḡnūn is the one. This device is rendered particularly effective by choosing Kutayyir, Gamīl's rawī, to be the judge, thus placing Maḡnūn on a higher poetic level than Gamīl, who was the greatest love poet in the 'Udhri tradition." *Love, Madness, and Poetry: An Interpretation of the Maḡnūn Legend* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1980), 64–65.
- 30 "And my uncle reported to me, from Abdullah ibn Shabīb, from Harun ibn Mūsa al-Farwī, he said: I asked Abū Bakr al-'Adawī of these two verses and he said: They are from Jamīl, and he did not know Majnūn, so I said, and are there any other (verses) with it? He said: yes, and recited." Al-Isfahānī, *Majnūn Laylā*, 2: 10.
- 31 *Jamīl Buthayna*, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 8: 141.
- 32 Andras Hamori, "Love Poetry (Ghazal)," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, 'Abbāsīd Belles-Lettres, ed. Julia Ashtiany, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 206.
- 33 Roy Mottahedeh, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 46.

- 34 In a discussion of the genre, Frye quotes the following line from Ecclesiastes: "Better is the sight of the eye than the wandering of desire." What is being condemned in this line is an insatiability of appetite, a state wherein being desirous or desiring is prolonged endlessly. Frye, *Romance*, 30.
- 35 Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 4.
- 36 J. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1979), 17–18. See my discussion of this issue in Chapter Five.
- 37 Peter Erickson, *Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 2.
- 38 Ibn Qutayba, *Al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'arā*, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif bi Misr, 1966), 569. This translation is As'ad Khairallah's in the appendix of *Love, Madness, and Poetry*, 140.
- 39 Ibid., 573. Translation Khairallah, 143.
- 40 Willem Raven, *Ibn Dawud al-Isbahani and His Kitab al-Zahra* (Leiden: University of Leiden Dissertation, 1989), 15.
- 41 Albert Z. Iskandar, "Al-Razi," in *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Religion Science and Learning in the 'Abbasid Period*, eds. R. B. Serjeant, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 370.
- 42 Raven, *Ibn Dawud al-Isbahani*, 89.
- 43 Iskandar, "Al-Razi," 371.
- 44 Raven, *Ibn Dawud al-Isbahani*, 29–30.
- 45 Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 315.
- 46 Al-Isfahānī, "*Majnūn Laylā*," 2: 14, 29.
- 47 Y. K. Stillman, N. A. Stillman, and T. Majda, "Libās," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, 2012, http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0581.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid. I would like to express much gratitude to Farooq Hamid for assisting me in understanding the nuances of the Persianized terms for clothing in this passage.
- 50 Nadia El Cheikh, *Women, Islam and 'Abbasid Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 16.
- 51 Ibid., 3, 16.
- 52 Dwight Reynolds, *Heroic Poets, Poetic Heroes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 85.
- 53 Mahmoud Manzalaoui, "Tragic Ends of Lovers: Medieval Islam and the Latin West," *Comparative Criticism* 1 (1979): 37–52.

5 A lost “Bedouin Arcadia”¹ – the tree man and the Umayyad tax man

In his book *Aristotle and the Arabs*, F.E Peters suggests that with the full integration of Aristotelianism in Islamic cultures (approximately during the ‘Abbāsid time period between 750–1050 CE), something happened to what he identifies as the “bedouin cosmos.”

Aristotelianism provided Islam with a view of intellectual history and a sense of direct connection with Hellenic antiquity. . . . The bedouin cosmos disappeared.²

This last sentence – “[t]he bedouin cosmos disappeared” – is critical for comprehending the cultural primitivist strains so germane to the love story of *Majnūn Laylā*.³ Paradoxically, as this Bedouin cosmos faded, poems and narratives featuring Bedouin poets became popular forms of entertainment in Baghdad and beyond. One such narrative popularized and celebrated in the cosmopolitan Islamic capital during the ninth and tenth centuries cast as its central character a Bedouin poet inspired by love who loses his beloved and madly wanders in desert spaces with the wild creatures – namely, the love story of *Majnūn Laylā*.

It was during the cultural absorption of Greek ideas and worldviews beginning approximately in the late ninth century that the evanescence and play of this Bedouin cosmos or cosmoses were palpably experienced.

In the ninth and tenth centuries and onward, including during the reign of the Būyids, both Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian cultural trends swirled within the urban centers of the ‘Abbāsid empire, especially in Baghdad. No better example and practitioner of this melding of Greco-Persian and Greco-Arabian identities is to be found than the famed ‘Abbāsid philosopher Ibn Sinā (d. 1037 CE), a man of Persian origins, fluent in Arabic, whose “fusion of Islam with Graeco-Persian neo-Platonism” was a hallmark of his philosophy, especially of his “general theory of human knowledge.”⁴ The stunningly multi-cultural aspects of Iraq, including the Persian elements, were prominently linked with both the ‘Abbāsid and Būyid courts and their respective caliphs,⁵ but spread much beyond these elite circles. Dimitri Gutas explains this by focusing on the momentous significance of the founding of the ‘Abbāsid capital in the city of Baghdad:

With the 'Abbāsīd revolution, the foundation of Baghdad, and the transfer of the seat of the caliphate to 'Iraq, the situation of the Arab empire with regard to its cultural orientations changed drastically. Away from Byzantine influence in Damascus, there developed a new multicultural society in Baghdad based on the completely different demographic mix of population in 'Iraq. This consisted of (a) Aramaic-speakers, Christians, and Jews, who formed the majority of the settled population; (b) Persian-speakers, concentrated primarily in the cities; and (c) Arabs, partly sedentarized and Christian, like those at al-Hira on the Euphrates, and partly nomadic, in the grazing grounds of northern 'Iraq. The Arab Muslims – other, of course, than those in the new capital – were concentrated, to the north, in the trading center of Mosul (Mawsil) and in the Sawad to the south, in the original garrison cities founded by them (Kufa, Basra, and Wasit), the first two of which provided, from the second/eighth century onwards, one of the most significant influences in the formation of the new melting-pot culture. There were, of course, other ethnic groups at the time in Iraq and beyond, especially in Iran (e.g., the Kurds in northern 'Iraq and in the Zagros mountains, the Baluchis in southeast Iran, etc.), but we have no record of their playing a role in shaping the outcome of the particular issue we are investigating. All of these groups participated, in one capacity or another, in the social, political, and cultural life of the new capital, and what is called classical Islamic civilization is the result of the fermentation of all the divergent ingredients which their various backgrounds, beliefs, practices, and values provided.⁶

Importantly, the emergence and permeation of Greco-Persian and Greco-Arabian (including also shades of Perso-Arabian) cultural trends and fashions within imperial Baghdad dovetailed with what Beatrice Gruendler has called "the romanticization of the Bedouin, a literary creation of that urban ['Abbāsīd] period."⁷ Actually the literary construct of the "exoticized, romanticized Bedouin" prevailed much earlier, that is, during the Umayyad era of the eighth century. Just as the Greco-Arabian translation project of rendering secular Greek and Syriac texts to Arabic was peaking during the reign of the caliph al-Ma'mūn between 813 and 833 CE, the literary romanticization of the Bedouin was flowering. To some extent, this flowering was a creative process that was taking place in the midst of a more general reaction to what may have been perceived as an intrusive excess of ideas and "sciences" imbibed from the ancient Greek masters – a reaction that then expressed itself by rendering the uniqueness and originality of "things intrinsically Arab" (including the unique qualities of the Bedouin of *Jāhiliyya*) prominent. In other words, the cultural achievements of pre-Islamic Arabs and Muslim Arabs were put on display as on par with those of the Greeks at about the same time as "the Bedouin cosmos disappeared."⁸

The love story of *Majnūn Laylā* is one of the by-products of this efflorescence – a bloom that powerfully demonstrates the fusion of Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian cultural trends through the romanticized construct of the "nomadic Bedouin." This fusion also becomes expressive of certain modes of masculinity in

urban 'Abbāsīd contexts, especially within the subcultures of the *ẓarīf* (those Baghdadi youth "with elegant, fashionable tastes in love poetry, clothing, food, wine and friends").⁹ Fashion becomes a harbinger of this melding of Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian trends, as evinced through the following statement:

When Greek science became wide-spread in Baghdad, it apparently became fashionable to ascribe [wise maxims] to ancient Greek authorities; others, of course, were translated from the Greek. The very idea of them in signet rings may have also originated from the Byzantine Empire, as well as the habit of giving them away as a keepsake.¹⁰

A statement by the 'Abbāsīd critic and theologian, al-Jahiz, in his ninth-century epistle on singing-girls, *Risālat al-Qiyān*, provides some further evidence of the Greco-Persian melding in this cultural trend: "A singing girl might give her lover a ring at *nowruz* [the Persian new year]; she would have his name engraved on her own ring."¹¹

The phrase "cultural primitivist" concerns precisely the aforementioned romanticization of the Bedouin, a literary creation that becomes full-blown mainly through and in the aftermath of the Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian cultural efflorescence. The element of the melancholic in the definition of "cultural primitivism" (i.e., that it is "a type of urban-based melancholic discontent with the complexities of civilization") consists of the longing or yearning for (and, at the same time, paradoxically, the recognition of distancing from) that pristine, pure, and simple Bedouin imaginary. The Arabic texts convey this kind of discontent through the literary motif of *ḥanīn ilā al-waṭan* or "nostalgic longing, yearning for the homeland."¹² Beatrice Greundler spells out some of the perceived differences between the Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd aspects of this motif.¹³ Greundler maintains that the differences in the motif between the two time periods are discernable as follows: first, the Umayyad one "broadened to include cities: the yearning for Mecca by Medinans, for other cities by conquering and colonizing by troops, or by the 'Abbāsīd settlers of Khurasan. Basra for instance, is praised as the Muslims' and Arabs' new home. The settlers of the garrison towns felt a nostalgia of second degree for their acquired homes. Only in the 'Abbāsīd period was *ḥanīn* widened to refer to a whole region. This coincided with the romanticization of the Bedouin, a literary creation of that urban period, epitomized in an event in which the caliph al-Mahdī stopped his retinue on a journey to have a lizard caught on the roadside, to be roasted and eaten on the spot Bedouin style."¹⁴

Consistent with the methodological approach in this book of posing questions and seeking answers about one historical phase through studying another, as regards the tenth-century *Majnūn Laylā*, it must be pointed out that this chapter highlights both the 'Abbāsīd and Umayyad subtexts found in the love story.¹⁵ Obviously, the motif or construct of the "romanticization of the Bedouin" is very relevant and is closely taken up in this chapter. Majnūn's character as this romanticized wild man Bedouin must be read both for his historical meanings and significance within the Umayyad-era imperial context (including those urbanites

living near the former Hijāzi capital of Medina) and also as the *exoticized Bedouin character* that 'Abbāsīd cosmopolitan audiences over time shaped in the ways in which this love story was compiled, formulated, performed, and received in Baghdad. Evidently, Majnūn functions both as a Bedouin pastoral shepherd (character) in the romance narrative, and to a much lesser extent, a pastoral poet (author) of the romance, i.e., as a semi-historical Umayyad Bedouin *poet* producing nostalgic pastoral-like poetry. This is quite similar to what As'ad Khairallah has discussed in this aspect with regard to his madness: he is the only lover-poet among the 'Uḏhrī poets who produces poetry foregrounding *folie d'amour* and incarnates his poetic madness himself.¹⁶ That is, he embodies the very trope(s) that his poetry foregrounds. Given the sedimented qualities of the romance, this chapter argues that the chronologically later 'Abbāsīd contexts powerfully re-engaged and reshaped the romance and/or engendered other readings (as featured in the *Aghānī* version of *Majnūn Laylā*), and that the two divergent types of masculinities with their two divergent 'Abbāsīd interpretive constructions prevailed in these readings. Thus, this chapter analyzes both the post-Jahilīyya Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd chronological subtexts found in the love story.

Bedouin ethos and the 'Abbāsīd poetics of nostalgia

Undoubtedly, there exists a kaleidoscopic use of generic features in this story: generic modes of romance and the pastoral are closely intertwined. It must be emphasized that *Majnūn Laylā* is a romance, in terms of genre, but it is a romance best described in modal terms. This pastoralization of the romance is related to the strains of "cultural primitivism" found in 'Abbāsīd literary sources.¹⁷ The pastoralism of *Majnūn Laylā* is an important element in the inscription of literary motifs of *ḥanīn ilā al-waṭan* and longing for things Bedouin amid an imperial urban 'Abbāsīd Islamic context suffused with Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian cultural trends.¹⁸

Pastoral romance is a form which, very simply put, is characterized by an evocation of an idyllic past in which "the domestic lives and loves of shepherds play a prominent part."¹⁹ Northrop Frye has mentioned how the pastoral Arcadia depicts "the simplified life of a handful of shepherds who are also lovers and poets."²⁰ The pastoral romance constructs the past as a plenitude in contrast to some perceived lack in the present. For example, Theocritus wrote his pastorals while he was at Ptolemy's court of Alexandria, when he most longed for and remembered the "actual herdsmen of his boyhood and the beautiful countryside of Sicily."²¹ The element of the idyllic is common to romance in general. In the pastoral romance, an evocation of an idyllic past is linked to the permanently happy, blissful lives of simple shepherds and shepherdesses, and in *Majnūn Laylā*, the pastoral is strongly intertwined with the "cultural primitivist" strains found in the romance.

Such an 'Abbāsīd pastoral mode in *Majnūn Laylā* may be described as a sentimentalization of loss, which includes elements of both rustic charm and pathos. Cosmopolitan 'Abbāsīd elites, especially those in the Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian avant-garde cliques, registered a primitivist romanticized fascination with

"pastoral nomadic Bedouin" contexts of the past, as conveyed in the literary motif of *ḥanīn ilā 'l-awṭān* or "nostalgic longing, yearning for the homeland." A sense of primitivist longing for a simpler way of life colors this fascination. The following narrative – one of which begins the story – frames a pastoral couplet that exemplifies the *ḥanīn* motif as linked with the 'Abbāsīd period:

Majnūn was in love with Laylā, daughter of Maḥdī ibn Sa'd . . . 'Āmir ibn Ṣa'ṣa'a whose nickname was 'Umm Mālik, when they were children. Each fell in love with the other while they were out tending the flocks of their families. They continued thus until they grew up and then she was veiled from him. And the following saying of his indicates this:

I became infatuated with Laylā when she was just a girl with a forelock,
when the swelling of her breasts had not yet been manifested to playmates.
Two children tending the lambs.
Would that we never had grown up, nor the lambs grown old.

(p. 11)

Here, the evocation of an idyllic past features an innocent Bedouin child shepherd and shepherdess – child versions of the 'Abbāsīd construct of the character of the desert-steeped Bedouin nomad. They are shown as blissfully falling in love within a pastoral setting that is so fleeting that it is immediately dimmed by the remembrance of love's demise ("This did not cease when they grew up, and then, she was veiled from him," and "Would that we never had grown up, nor had the lambs grown old."). Hence, unlike the conventional pastoral, we have the evocation of both plenitude and lack in the past to contrast with the lack of such simplicity in the present. A nostalgia for Bedouin pastoral origins is clearly present in the evocation of the incipient love between Majnūn and Laylā. Full of yearning, they evoke an age of innocence before the lovers' maturation. The import of Laylā being veiled, i.e., separated from him, once they "grew up" or became sexually mature, is clear. The reference to budding breasts, in the hemistich when the swelling of her breasts had not yet been manifested to playmates, signifies the onset of puberty, and underscores the childhood origins of the couple's love. In the 'Abbāsīd rendition of the 'Uḍhrī love story of *Kuthayyir 'Azza*, as well, Kuthayyir falls in love with 'Azza when she is just a young lass with 'budding breasts.'²² In the aforementioned verses, Majnūn laments their maturation given its social impact on their relations. With adulthood, their love has been sacrificed just as the lambs presumably were sacrificed once they matured – but perhaps most importantly, what has been "sacrificed" or lost is a pristine nomadic Bedouin arcadia, and what has replaced it is an 'Abbāsīd imperial cosmopolitan empire.

A desire for timelessness – which is to say: an absence of change – coupled with a nostalgia for the pristine Bedouin cosmos that has disappeared is evoked by these verses.²³ The *ḥanīn* motif linked with the 'Abbāsīd period extends to an imagined, spacious desert region, but this is importantly preceded by the 'Abbāsīd construct of the character of the Bedouin, desert-steeped nomad. A critique of the

non-pastoral (i.e., urban and settled milieus of empire) is suggested in the desire for a bygone time and social order. The pastoral setting and the sentiments being evoked by the verses are somewhat reminiscent of the originality and mythic import of the Adam and Eve story (with which the then-Islamic milieu was familiar given its representations in the Qur'ān). In discussing some of the pastoral aspects of romance, Frye has observed that the "closer romance comes to a world of original identity, the more clearly something of the symbolism of the garden of Eden reappears."²⁴ This important narrative ushers in the formal beginning of the romance just as it is concerned with the start of the *Majnūn Laylā* love affair.

For his 'Abbāsīd audiences, perhaps to provide comic relief and perhaps to demonstrate that "things Bedouin" were more pervasive than "things Islamic," even in the consciousness of a Meccan muezzin (one who makes the call to prayer), al-Iṣfahānī transmits an anecdote right after this pastoral beginning, in which, during his call for prayer, the muezzin accidentally utters the word for "lambs" (*bahm*) in place of the word for prayer (*al-ṣalā*), after just having heard Majnūn's pastoral couplet sung aloud.

At the time when Ibn Mulayka was making the prayer call, he heard al-Akhḍar al-Juddī singing from the abode of al-'Āas ibn Wā'il:

I fell in love with a belle when she was a girl with a forelock
when the swelling of her breasts had not yet been manifested to playmates.
Two children guarding the lambs.
Would that we never had grown up, nor had the lambs grown old.

(p. 12)

He intended to say: "Come to prayer [*al-ṣalā*]," but then he said: "Come to the lambs," and the people of Mecca heard him. So he went out in the morning to apologize to them.

Disappearance of the Bedouin cosmos & Majnūn as the tree man

From the ninth century to the tenth century, there is an accentuation and elaboration of Majnūn as the wild man, evident through a distinct set of narratives in al-Iṣfahānī's tenth-century version of *Majnūn Layla*, that portray attempts by the Umayyad state's imperial officials to resolve the conflict between Majnūn and Laylā's family. What is striking are the cultural primitivist glosses on the Majnūn wild man character as described in these 'Abbāsīd-era passages with Umayyad-era dimensions. The intertextual elements between these two historical phases, i.e., the 'Abbāsīd and Umayyad periods, are found in the love story overall, however they are especially noteworthy in this set of narratives. In al-Iṣfahānī's story, two anecdotal units surface side by side involving attempts at resolution by two different Umayyad-era officers. The structure and sequence of both units is similar, but Nawfal b. Musāhiq is the subject in the second unit whereas the first concerns

a notable named 'Umar ibn Abdul Raḥman ibn Auf: "Al-Haytham said: Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam appointed 'Umar ibn Abdul Raḥman ibn Auf, on the collection of taxes from Bani Ka'ab, Qushayr, Ja'da, Harish, Habib, and Abdullah" (p. 16).

It should be mentioned that the figure of Nawfal is present in both Ibn Qutayba's ninth-century version and al-Iṣfahānī's tenth-century version of the love story, but as noted, the later tenth-century version registers a significant development of the wild man persona of Majnūn. It also should be remembered that the ninth-century Arabic version of the story consists of only four pages, whereas the tenth-century rendition in the *Aghānī* comprises about a hundred pages. My focus in this section will be the character of Nawfal b. Musāhiq in the *Aghānī* rendition because it is through mainly the encounter between Nawfal and Majnūn that the most vivid 'Abbāsīd cultural primitivist glosses are conveyed. As suggested, while he is present in both 'Abbāsīd versions (that compiled by Ibn Qutayba and that by al-Iṣfahānī), the cultural primitivist glosses are rendered prominent in the *Aghānī* rendition.

Historically, Nawfal b. Musāhiq was the governor of Medina in 83/702 during the early Umayyad period.²⁵ As an appointee of the Umayyad state, Nawfal ibn Musāhiq, comes to the 'Āmir tribe to collect taxes. This description of the representative of empire in terms of revenue-collection is consistent with historical fact, since after the establishment of the Umayyad caliphate, the most substantial link between the state and the tribes was through taxes. After having espied Majnūn in a condition of wildness, and having inquired about his plight, this bureaucrat of the state becomes interested in civilizing this wild man: he pledges to get Laylā married to Majnūn.

There is more than one passage in the *Aghānī* rendition that features Nawfal. Of the two consecutive narrative units describing the encounter between Nawfal and Majnūn in al-Iṣfahānī's version, it is the second one that contains 'Abbāsīd cultural primitivist content. It features an especially arresting portrayal of Majnūn as a "tree man." As for the first one, it is brief and not as replete with detail and may be summarized thus: Nawfal ibn Musāhiq sees Majnūn playing naked in the dirt, wants to clothe him, and he is told if "'you want him [Majnūn] to speak properly, mention Laylā to him;'" He then approaches and asks Majnūn for his story: "'Did love do this to you?'" (17).

The striking portrayal of Majnūn as tree man is present only in the tenth-century *Aghānī* rendition, and the relevant passage reads as follows narrated by Nawfal himself:

Nawfal said: I came to the desert and asked about him, so it was said to me: He went wild and we do not know of him or where he went, so I went out one day to hunt, and with me was a group from my companions. Until I arrived and we reached a tree and by it was a group of deer, in it was a person who could be seen in the gaps of the tree, so my companions marveled at that, then I came to him and knew it was [the] Majnūn I was informed of. So I came down from my animal and removed some of my clothes and walked gently until I arrived at the tree. Then I climbed it until I could see over the deer and

over him, and I saw it was him and his hair was on his face, and I did not recognize him until I concentrated enough, and he was picking the fruits of the tree, so he lifted his head and I recited a line of his poetry. . . . He [Nawfal] said: I shooed away the deer, and [Majnūn] began to recite the rest of the ode/poem; I shall not forget the gentleness of his tone and voice as he said . . . (66).

Several arresting details emerge from this second narrative: a herd of deer is the giveaway sign of Majnūn's whereabouts, and Nawfal spots Majnūn perched high up amid the branches of a tall tree. This is such a strange and wondrous sight that Nawfal himself observes that his "companions marveled at that." Hence, the text provides a glimpse of both the construction of Majnun as the tree man as well as something of the reception of this motif through the explicit and implicit reactions of implied audiences "marveling" at this sight. The narrative next describes Nawfal himself climbing the tree to the very top so that he could see the deer and the wild man figure below him (who was perched over the deer), and Nawfal then observes (again to paraphrase): I spotted him, with all this facial hair, and I barely recognized him, and he was picking the fruits of the tree.

A carefully stylized, crafted 'Abbāsid primitivist portrayal of the "romanticized Bedouin wild man" is framed: the symbolism of the tree and treetop, deer and fruit; the silence and serenity that the scene exudes. Majnūn's hairiness is noteworthy. Michael Dols comments:

In rags and disheveled, Qays looked like a wild man. His "wildness within" was a reflection of his "wildness without": his long finger-nails, his long and unkempt hair, and the growth of his body hair. Except for a brief period when long hair was a mongol fashion in the later Middle Ages, it is an unusual characteristic for Muslim men.²⁶

The manner in which the "civilized" interacts with the "gentle savage," again, consists of a carefully, etched portrayal of the trope of the Bedouin wild man. It is noteworthy the manner in which Nawfal is described as dismounting, removing his clothes and "walking gently until . . . [he] arrived at the tree," and as well as the way he is described as cautiously and gently interacting with Majnūn. The presence of the deer as highly pastoral romance creatures, the symbolism of the tree branches and fruit all conjure up a romanticized view on the part of urbanites of the Eden-like qualities of the 'wild and untamed Bedouin desert' of long ago. This portrayal accentuates and stylizes the cultural primitivist qualities of his setting as a natural, unfettered, wildness of a verdant and serene sort. The assertion that Lovejoy and Boas make that "cultural primitivism"²⁷ constitutes a "belief of . . . [people] living in a relatively highly evolved and complex cultural condition that a life far simpler and less sophisticated in some or in all respects is a more desirable life" is resonant with this playful 'Abbāsid construction of Majnūn as the wild, tree man.

When both the possibly Umayyad-era and the 'Abbāsid Nawfal units are compared, it is significant that, in the first one, Nawfal desires to clothe and dress

Majnūn the wild man, whereas in the second one, Nawfal himself removes his clothes to scamper up the tree and join the wild man there. In this second longer narrative, 'Abbāsīd cultural primitivist glosses vividly color the Umayyad taxman's attempts to access the pristine, primitive state of the wild man and join him in his Bedouin Arcadia. This is crucial because such a gesture underscores what Gruendler has called "the romanticization of the Bedouin, a literary creation of that urban ['Abbāsīd] period."²⁸ This symbolic gesture vividly registers a primitivist romanticized fascination with 'pastoral nomadic Bedouin' contexts of the past. A primitivist longing, on the part of cosmopolitan, urban 'Abbāsīd Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian avant-garde cliques, for a simpler way of life colors this fascination.

The goal and promise that Nawfal ostensibly sets forth even to Majnūn himself is to somehow "redeem" and civilize the wild man: to remove him from the dirt, bones, and wild bushes amid which he is hidden; to clean and clothe him; and importantly, to marry him to Laylā. At this juncture, according to the romance storyline, while Laylā has received Ward's marriage proposal, the marriage has not been consummated, although the romance chapter does not clarify this completely. Nawfal is shown inquiring of Majnūn: "Did love [*ḥubb*] do this to you?" and then he is depicted as proceeding to implement a plan to confront and persuade Laylā's tribe. Ultimately, however, Nawfal is unable to keep his promise to Majnūn the wild man.

'Abbāsīd romanticized irreligious 'wild man'

Clearly, in the Arabic context, the love story of Majnūn expresses a romantic nostalgia for and fascination with life during a simpler time and place populated with Bedouin-like characters.²⁹ Just when the evanescence of the "Bedouin cosmos" was most palpably experienced due to the cultural absorption of Greek ideas and worldviews beginning in approximately the mid-ninth century onward, 'Abbāsīd Baghdadi courtly circles were hugely entertained by this most famous story (the poems of which were performed as songs) that featured a rather ancient and transgressive Bedouin love poet who loses his beloved due to poetic indiscretions and has to flee to the desolate desert to hide amid trees and live with the wild animals, all the while reciting pastoral poetry.

Jean-Claude Vadet, André Miquel, As'ad Khairallah, and Michael Dols have all dealt in varying degrees with the construction of Majnūn as wild man. A number of these critics have pointed out the anti-Muslim tendencies of Majnūn's characterization as a wild man (as etched in the 'Abbāsīd-era readings). Dols declares that "Qays [Majnūn] the savage would appear as the negator of Muslim social values."³⁰ Both Dols and Miquel have talked about some of the traits of his *ensauvagement*. Miquel writes:

Traits physiques: ce sont la pilosité accrué, libéré, ou les ongles démesurément longs. Traits de comportement aussi: la nourriture faite d'herbe, Majnūn piaffant comme un cheval sauvage a l'approche d'un être humain, et la vie si bien partagée avec les gazelles qu'elles ne le fuient plus.³¹

Khairallah, somewhat in the same vein, has indicated that the romantic quality of this characterization endows Majnūn with a certain Sufi-like mystical cast; he is described as emaciated and cut off from the social world. Khairallah also has pointed out that "among the famous love-poets who were heroes of love-romances, Magnun is the only one depicted as a madman whose total alienation from society leads him to live with the wild animals of the desert."³² This, in itself, is significant, especially within the context of powerful subsequent (late medieval) Persian, Indian and Turkish visual and artistic traditions that pertain to the *Majnūn Laylā* romance and highlight Majnūn as a 'wild man.'

But Qays – or Majnūn – is both negated and the one who negates; he is both the sinful Bedouin wild man and the primitivist, romanticized Bedouin wild man. In other words, what these critics have failed to point out is that this portrayal of Majnūn as "wild man" lends itself to dual, opposing interpretations – only one of which may be characterized as the 'Abbāsīd era primitivist construct. To better elucidate this, we turn to Hayden White who has importantly set forth two different paradigms or modes of constructing the "wild man." The first, which White suggests may be traced back to Biblical and Hebraic archetypes, conflates the physical with a moral condition and hence underscores Majnūn's portrayal as the irreligious "wild man . . . the antitype of the desirable humanity, as warning of what men would fall into if they definitively rejected society and its norms."³³ On the other hand, the second mode, which more resembles the romanticized construct of the Bedouin, White describes in this way: "[I]f one saw society, with all its struggle, as a fall away from natural perfection, then he might be inclined to populate that nature with wild men whose function was to serve as anti-types of social existence."³⁴

The classical model (resonant, perhaps, with Greek-based archetypes of, for example, Orpheus as 'wild man') constructs the wild man as a kind of return to "natural perfection" (since complex "social existence" is equated with a "fall away from natural perfection"). Significantly, this classical model is akin to what Beatrice Gruendler has called "the romanticization of the Bedouin, a literary creation of that urban ['Abbāsīd] period" that emerges in the wake of absorption of Greco-Persian and Greco-Arabian cultural trends and fashions within urban imperial Baghdad.³⁵ As the romanticized Bedouin, Majnūn is wild, or of the desert, and romantically asocial and irreligious. But the wild man construction also incorporates a Hebraist ethical model that views him as "an antitype of [Muslim] desirable humanity." Consequently, the poet is a rich embodiment of the cultural primitivist projections of the 'Abbāsīd urbanite audiences – primarily the avant-garde Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian members as well as general imperial urban audiences.

Umayyad imperialism, communal belonging and the Bedouin

Once again, it is important to remember that Majnūn's character must be read while keeping in mind both the Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd subtexts. Answers about the aspects in the romance resonant with "Umayyad memoria" are reached

through studying the 'Abbāsid phase, as well as vice versa. Such a dance back and forth is integral to the readings of the romance as it is recorded in the *Aghānī* compendium.

As previously noted, a number of scholars date the provenance of *Majnūn Laylā* to the early eighth century during the time of the Umayyad caliphate. We may recall that in al-Isfahānī's story, two anecdotal units surface side by side involving attempts at resolution by two different Umayyad-era officers: Nawfal b. Musāhiq is the subject in the second unit whereas the first concerns 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Auf. Here is what al-Isfahānī's story states regarding this latter figure: "Al-Haytham said: Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam appointed 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Auf, on the collection of taxes from Banī Ka'ab, Qushayr, Ja'da, Ḥarīsh, Ḥabīb, and Abdullah."³⁶ It is hard to ignore the geographical and historical markers in this snippet: there is the mention of Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam (the second Umayyad caliph who ruled from 684–685 CE) and also a historically supported name of a provincial governor, namely 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Auf. There is too the mention of the tribes from which the taxes were collected, including for example, that Majnūn is putatively linked with the Banī Ka'ab, and also with the subtribes of Ja'da and Laylā is connected with al-Ḥarīsh. The text then goes on to state that: "until the next year after Omar ibn Abdul Rahman, they were approached by Nawfal ibn Musāhiq."³⁷

Briefly, we turn to address the Umayyad dimensions as regards the aforementioned character of Nawfal b. Musāhiq, common to both Ibn Qutayba's ninth-century and al-Isfahānī's tenth-century versions of the romance. As stated, Nawfal b. Musāhiq was the governor of Medina in 83/702 during the early Umayyad period.³⁸ The presence and longevity of this internal historical marker regarding the romance's possible origins is compelling, and in his preamble al-Isfahānī cites one tradition in which the *ruwāt* (or narrators) attest to an encounter between Majnūn and an ancestor from this family of Musāhiq, namely this Nawfal b. Musāhiq:

Aḥmad ibn Abdul-Azīz reported to me, he said: Omar ibn Shaba reported, he said, Abdullah ibn Abi Ṣa'ad told me from al-Hizāmi, he said: And I did not hear it from al-Hizāmi so I wrote it from Ibn Abi Ṣa'ad. Ahmad said: Ibn Abi Ṣa'ad told us from al-Hizāmi, he said: Abdul-Jabbar ibn Ṣa'ad, ibn Sulayman, ibn Nawfal, ibn Musāhiq, from his father, from his grandfather who said: I journeyed (to collect taxes) to Banī 'Āmir and I saw Majnūn, and I came to him and he recited to me (3).³⁹

As noted earlier, Al-Isfahānī's version contains two consecutive narrative units describing the encounter between Nawfal and Majnūn.

Nawfal's inability to keep his pledge to Majnūn bears some significance in the contexts of both pre-Islamic and early Umayyad Arab society. The importance of the vow in both pre-Islamic and early Umayyad Arab society has been discussed by R. Mottahedeh.⁴⁰ The perceived violation of an oath on the part of Nawfal is foregrounded in Majnūn's verses accompanying this narrative. In these verses, the poet castigates himself for "being led to follow any course" in the quest for

his beloved and expresses the pain and bitterness of being betrayed by friend and foe. Recall that two different Umayyad governors are featured in al-Iṣfahānī's tenth-century versions of the romance: Nawfal b. Musāhiq and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Auf. This latter figure also makes a pledge to Majnūn to which he is unable to adhere. He offers Majnūn some camels as compensation for breaking his promise, but the poet rejects his offer.

Just why is it that both Umayyad state dignitaries are depicted as failing in their attempts to arbitrate the dispute between Majnūn and the family of his beloved? The narratives suggest that the principal reason is the fact that the authorities have already sided with Laylā's family against Majnūn by granting them the right to kill him with impunity should he enter their home. Both political figures are unable to effectively represent the cause of one who has been rendered *persona non grata*, who has been rendered liminal in the legal, social, and political sense by the Umayyad state. In their responses to the overtures made by both Nawfal and 'Abd al-Raḥmān, Laylā's family categorically reject any form of reconciliation and they invoke the sultan's punitive measures against Majnūn as proof of the seriousness of the poet's unacceptable conduct. According to Laylā's kinfolk, Majnūn is uninterested in anything as honorable as marriage. They adduce as evidence for their claim Majnūn's instigation of the scandal concerning Laylā and his repeated forced entry into their homes after the refusal of his marriage proposal, as well as his tendency to lampoon them in his poetry.

From the perspective of the wild Bedouin poet Majnūn, the Umayyad state elites are unable to keep their promises to him and aid him in his desire to marry Laylā. Is this a renegeing of their promises to domesticate the Bedouin wild man, despite his apparent willingness to be re-integrated into the social order? Ultimately, the Umayyad imperial state cannot help the wild Bedouin with the one thing that has become difficult for him after the advent of the new religion of Islam – a sense of belonging or identity.

Ignaz Goldziher wrote that "it is well known that the subjugation of the Bedouins under the laws of the state was always the most difficult part of the state administration in the East in old as in modern times."⁴¹ Nomadic tribes that had previously functioned as nearly autonomous units found it necessary to adapt to the centralized state. Moreover, the process of adjustment to their new identity as settled subjects of the Islamic state generated rising socio-economic expectations among the Bedouin tribes that were largely unmet. Indeed, Tahar Labib Djedadi, relying on Marxist theory, has argued that these stories can be considered a literary expression of the 'Uḍhrī tribe's resistance to economic and social marginalization experienced in the Umayyad period.⁴² The Egyptian critic Taha Husayn attributes the preponderance of the melancholy and nostalgic in 'Uḍhrī poetry to this disparity between expectation and reality:

In his view, the now [during the end of Umayyad period likely] Islamized Bedouin poets had been influenced by the idealizing and refining factors in their new faith, but they did not join in the new civilization and its benefits. Thus, in isolation and facing the frustration of their awakened material

expectations, these poets turned inward, complaining and idealizing, their complaint being aimed at present conditions and their idealizing at the past, presumably before Islam, when life was better or when those new expectations did not exist.⁴³

In this romance, such narratives that foreground a disparity between expectation and reality as perceived by Majnūn, the Bedouin wild man, concern expectations of a different sort. They clearly emphasize, on the one hand, the unreliability of the Umayyad state, as perceived by the Bedouin wild man – an unreliability in terms of both keeping pledges and arbitration of disputes – and, on the other hand, as perceived by the Umayyad state representative, the resistance of the Bedouin figure of unruliness to being ‘domesticated and domiciled.’⁴⁴

We now turn to further questions and answers about the “Umayyad memoria” resonant in the romance by examining how Majnūn’s character functions as a vehicle for expressing nostalgia on the part of Umayyad-era Hijāzi urbanites. The Hijāzi urbanites constitute those populations of Arab Muslims dwelling in the cities of Medina and Mecca after the relocation of the new Umayyad capital to the city of Damascus in al-Shām or Syria. In this regard, Majnūn, as the semi-historical Umayyad Bedouin *poet*, is also producing nostalgic pastoral-like poetry for the Najd.

Pastoralism, the Najd and ḥanīn ilā al-waṭān

The symbolism of the Najd is an important pastoral element in the romance. In his study of the pastoral in early Arabic poetry, Jaroslav Stetkevych, has observed: “Among the numerous instances of the early manifestation of this regional nostalgic spirit [for the Najd] is the poetry attributed to Majnūn, who seems to have been invented precisely to accommodate such feelings.”⁴⁵ This theme of yearning for the Najd is a stock motif of pre-Islamic poetry but, as Stetkevych points out, “in the post-Jahiliya period . . . metaphorization and symbolic saturation [of names of places] become fully consummated.”⁴⁶ After the establishment and institutionalization of the Umayyad Empire bureaucracy in the new Umayyad capital of Damascus, this topos acquired new significances and connotations given Bedouin dispersion and displacement in the wave of military conquests. The eclipse of a “Bedouin Arabian homeland” by the status of the conquered territories seems to have been keenly felt by the various urbanite audiences.

According to Stetkevych, the “Bedouin poet thus began possessing Tihamah, the Hijāz, and, above all, the Najd when he stepped out of them; and when he had lost these regions in the dispersion of the empire, these places, these names, then possessed him.”⁴⁷ This assessment seems to resonate with Beatrice Greundler’s claims that the literary motif of ḥanīn ilā al-waṭān or “nostalgic longing, yearning for the homeland” in the Umayyad context consists of “longing and yearning” for concrete, named cities or spaces (e.g., nostalgia for the sacred *axis mundi*, that is, the ancient city of Mecca or the acquired craving for new garrison towns such as Basra).⁴⁸

What are some of the traits of the Najd that lend themselves to this kind of poetic treatment? The "Najd . . . with the Hidjaz and al-Arud forms Central Arabia; it is the centrally located high plateau of the Arabian peninsula . . . [and] the territory in which pure Arabic is spoken."⁴⁹ Furthermore, it "has historically and legendarily enjoyed an undisputed claim to autochthony as regards purity of lineage and correctness of the Arabic language."⁵⁰ The geographical limits of the wilderness within which *Majnūn* roams are the "boundaries of al-Shām or al-Yaman." While al-Shām (north) and al-Yaman (south) represent the outer limits of this poetic space, the Najd is the *locus centralis* or the origin, the home or as Stetkevych puts it, "the autochthonous symbol."

Again, we note that some critics and scholars attribute the provenance of *Majnūn Laylā* to the early eighth century, during the time of the Umayyad caliphate. J. Stetkevych's claims regarding the chronology of the topos of nostalgia for the Najd support this dating. He observes that "musings over broad regions of the Arabian Peninsula, like the Hijāz, Tihamah and, especially, the Najd are datable within that early Islamic [late seventh century to early eighth century] revival of Bedouin lyricism which culminated in the passionate, sentimental, and idealizing poetry known as 'Uḏhrī'."⁵¹

The Najd is centrally located in the Hijāz. The chronological evidence further confirms the idea that the "inventors" (to use Stetkevych's term) and initial popularizers of the *Majnūn Laylā* romance perhaps were urbanites living in the Hijāz during the early Umayyad period. As Stetkevych suggests, the romance constructs the Bedouin nomad's experience of the loss of the Najd as the forfeiture of an autochthonous site, a homeland. The Hijāzi urbanites experience the it as a loss of the political centrality of the Hijāz/Najd, due to the political transfer of the seat of the caliphate from the Hijāz (i.e., Medina) to Damascus with the rise of the Umayyads. Both J. Stetkevych and Salma Jayyusi⁵² attest to the importance of this experience in the rise of 'Uḏhrī poetry generally. Stetkevych remarks that the "Najd enters the poetic realm most clearly during the Umayyad period when the displacement of positions and inversion of roles between the periphery (the outlying Damascus) and centrality (the Hijāz) yields a state of tension whereby 'periphery claims centrality and centrality is reduced to periphery.'"⁵³ Such a sense of deficit (experienced by urbanites) reflects the tensions experienced by Arab society in its transition from a Bedouin culture to that of an Islamic cosmopolitan imperial culture.

Returning to the text of the romance, the following passage (of which there exists variants) effectively exhibits the pastoral symbolism of the Najd:

And they said he used to roam madly in the desert with the beasts. . . . He began to roam until he reached the borders of al-Shām and when he regained his senses, he asked passers-by of the tribes of the Arabs about the Najd. It would be said to him: what do you have to do with the Najd? You are practically in the Shām. You are in such-and-such place. He would say: Show me the way [to the Najd]. They took mercy on him and offered to give him a

mount or some clothes but he refused. They directed him toward the Najd and he headed that way.

(22)

A powerful portrayal of Majnūn's longing for the homeland, of the motif of *ḥanīn ilā al-waṭan*, is also found in the following narrative. While at the well of Maymūn in Mecca, he is shown pining for the chance to breathe *al-ṣabā* (zephyr or the east wind of the Najd).⁵⁴ In Majnūn's poetry concerning the *ṣabā*, it is often its healing and curative powers that are foregrounded. The coolness of the breeze is supposed to soothe the fever of love and the poet believes that if he, as the afflicted lover, breathes its air, his concerns or *humūm* will become clear: Indeed, the east wind is a breeze which when it blows over a pained soul, its worries become manifest. (26)

In this narrative, the local inhabitants are shown fearing that Majnūn's despair is such that he will throw himself off a mountain. This tension is only alleviated when a traveler from the Najd appears on the scene and assuages his nostalgia through conversation about the region. The traveler asks:

What is he doing here and why are you holding him? They replied: Because of what he does to himself, for he treats himself so vilely that even his enemies would have mercy on him. He pleads: Take me out to breathe the east wind of Najd. So we bring him out here, and he turns toward the region of Najd hoping that the east wind would blow in his direction. We do not like to leave him alone, for fear he might throw himself down from the mountain. Be kind, come close and let him know you have come from the Najd. When he asks you how things are in the Najd and in his home, let him know. I said: I will do so. They told him: O Abū l-Mahdī [Majnūn], this is a man who has come from the region of the Najd. He sighed so deeply that I thought his heart had broken. Then he began to ask me about it, valley by valley and place by place. While I described it for him, he cried in the most intense and heart-breaking manner. Then he recited:

Would that I knew if the two hills of Qanā
through the length of the night, have changed after my parting,
And if the high winds blow on Najd
when they carry the smell of lavender.

(23)

In both passages, Majnūn's remembrance of being at home in the Najd is closely intertwined with his awareness of its absence in his present. Yet undoubtedly, as is true of the pastoral, its evocation yields a plenitude to mitigate the perceived lack. His verses are a celebration of the beauty of the Najd, and all the senses are evoked in the remembrance of the Najd's physical landscape. The descriptions of the feel of the east wind and the scent of lavender also suggest a nostalgia for a spring season.

What is significant is that the instances in which Majnūn is depicted lost and pining for the Najd only occur after he has had contact with a ritual site. In the first

passage cited, he has just disrupted his performance of the Hajj pilgrimage at the Ka'ba (the central, sacred Islamic shrine for pilgrimage), hence, more tellingly, this contact with a ritual site has been somehow been subverted by him. Soon after the pilgrimage, he is taken by his father to visit the tomb of the prophet in the hope of recovering from his lovesickness. Indeed, this Hajj narrative is one of the key and signature episodes in the story of *Majnūn Laylā* and is found in both the ninth-century and tenth-century versions of the romance. Majnūn's father takes him to pilgrimage to Mecca in order to cure him of his love sickness for Laylā, but instead discovers that Majnūn succeeds in turning the tables by asking divine support for an even greater love obsession. This journey to Mecca occurs right after Majnūn hears of the not just the marriage of Laylā to another man, but also of the consummation of that marriage. In utter despair, and having lost his mind, the tribal elders and others counsel the father to take him to pilgrimage.

Then his father said to him: Cling to the drapes of the Ka'ba and ask Allah to cure you from the love of Layla, so he clung to the drapes of the Ka'ba and said: "Oh Lord, increase and intensify my love for Layla, and do not let me forget her ever!" And so he wandered and lost his mind and did not adjust.

(pg. 22)

As a signature episode, this narrative comes to have a huge visual capital in later Islamic civilizational art because, in a sense, it encapsulates a cogent and compelling example of a rejoinder to orthodox, Ḥanbalī-type Islam – a rejoinder that sought fulfillment in a human love, albeit divinely inspired and sanctioned because Majnūn is shown asking his Lord to "increase . . . [his] love for Layla," and nobody else. This signature episode, too, is a crucial proof-text of sorts for the constructions of the mysticism of Majnūn's masculinity, and for the antecedents of the *faqīr* Sufi masculinity throughout Islamic civilizations. In other words, this episode that then also birthed the Sufi counter-movement (to normatively, orthodox, dominant modes of Islam) by privileging the ecstatic form of mystical gravitations toward a divine beloved.

Through such syntactic and symbolic associations, one may discern intimations of both Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd Ḥanbalī (intersecting) subtexts concerning ritual transgression – i.e. only after mocking and subverting religious rituals does Majnūn become the *lost* wild man, displaced and nostalgic for his homeland, the Najd, just as only after transgressing courtship rituals does he lose his mind and pine for Laylā. Thus, built into this Najd pastoralism, this Bedouin sentimentalism, is a primarily 'Abbāsīd Islamic subtext consisting of intimations of a moral nature that recast Majnūn's search and pining for the Najd as the wild madman tragically lost and astray as a result of his religious ritual transgressions.

Laylā as homeland: centrality of the Najd

According to Stetkevych, the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* "celebrates to an equal degree the beloved Laylā and Najd." Loss of a woman is accompanied by the loss

of an autochthonous home. The parallels in the symbolism expressing his yearning for Laylā and nostalgia for the Najd are unmistakably present in the *Aghānī* rendition of the romance (though perhaps not to the extent of Stetkevych's "equal degree"). Sentiment, space, and time are all intimately intertwined in the romance. Majnūn longs for all three: Laylā (beloved), the Najd (where he met his beloved) and childhood (time of togetherness with beloved). Absence of the beloved is akin to a state of suspension, a state of liminality: "*When I do not meet Laylā I am as if suspended with thin ropes, whirling between plain and mountain*" (61).⁵⁵

Laylā and the Najd are sentimentally and symbolically linked in multiple ways. Both are objects of Majnūn's yearning. Similarly, both have been once "possessed" (idyllic) and then lost (pathos). Memories of this possession continue to inspire the yearning. Majnūn misses the Najd only when he is far from it, when he is at the borders of al-Shām or al-Yemen, just as he craves Laylā only when distant from her. Significantly, several narratives from the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* also underscore the genre connections between the love prelude (*nasīb*) of the pre-Islamic ode and Majnūn's poetry, especially as characterized by these motifs of *ḥanīn ilā al-waṭan* and pastoralism. A very Bedouin *nasīb*-like scene is conveyed in the following narrative; when accompanied by his cousins, Majnūn is depicted visiting and weeping over the remains and traces of Laylā's encampment:

And Majnūn had cousins who would come to him and talk to him and comfort him, so he stood above them one day as they were sitting, so they said to him: Oh Aba Mahdī, won't you sit? He said: no, rather I will go to the home of Laylā and see her traces [*atlāl*] there, so I can relieve what is in my heart through her. So they said to him: We will come with you. He said: If you do, then you have done well and done generously. So they got up with him, until they arrived at Laylā's home. So he stood there for a while looking at her traces [*atlāl*] and weeping, and would stand at every place she was and weep.

(28)

The mention of the rhetorical and lexical term *atlāl*, or traces, is crucial: in the pre-Islamic ode, it is precisely this concept that is employed in the lexicon of the love prelude (*nasīb*) to powerfully evoke the Bedouin poet's longing and nostalgia for his "lost and bygone" beloved and the memory of his time with her.⁵⁶

Furthermore, the memory and loss of Laylā and the Najd (very Bedouin symbols as well as symbols of social aggregation) are highly sentimentalized. Both are associated with childhood innocence. According to the story, when they were both little children, he met, played, and fell in love with Laylā in the Najd at or around Mt. Ṭaubad:

When Majnūn and Laylā were young, they would raise cattle for their families near a mountain in their country called al-Taubad. When he lost his mind and went wild, he would come to the mountain and stay there, and if he remembered the days he and Laylā would spend there, he would fall into

intense distress and he would wander until he would reach the outskirts of the Levant.

(52)

This narrative describes his visit to this mountain, a site of his childhood love, and the account relates how the visit evokes memories that traumatize him, such that he ends up wandering madly in al-Shām.

Actually, as symbols of social aggregation, both Laylā and the Najd elude Majnūn. The romance's indexing of distance between him and these symbols emphasizes his wildness, his social liminality, and the tragic nature of his character:

To stress Qays' alienation from society, the Arabic versions of the legend described him wandering aimlessly, so that he found himself on the approaches to the north or Syria or alternatively, to the south, namely, Yemen; he asks for directions and returns to the Najd. He never entirely cuts himself off from his family, and he is never completely abandoned by them. . . . Qays' solitary behavior was [however] antithetical to the very strong bonds that existed normally between the individual and family.⁵⁷

Yet evocations, of both Laylā and the Najd, also mentally and physically reorient him. Just as mention of his beloved's name makes him temporarily lucid, likewise the memory of the Najd and his obsession with finding and reaching it function as an attempt at recovery after disorientation. Importantly, the Najd also functions as a sacred space, as a pilgrimage site that supplants the Islamic one. His (ostensibly) mad wanderings and his gravitations toward the Najd themselves have a ritual dimension.

Given the parallel symbolism between Laylā and the region of the Najd in the romance, an identification of certain allegorical strains becomes possible on a limited basis. The beloved personifies a territorial region located at the heart of the Arabian peninsula and considered the site of origin for the linguistic purity of the Arabic language. In our romance, Laylā's father, like the prophet Muhammad, relegates control over his prized possession to a member of the Thaqīf. In other words, it is to a man from the Thaqīf, one of the tribes (along with the Quraysh and the Ansar) politically privileged by the prophet, that Majnūn loses Laylā.⁵⁸ Majnūn, constructed as a member of a politically deprived Bedouin tribe, the 'Āmir b. Ṣa'sa'a, loses his beloved to a man from the wealthy, politically empowered tribe of Thaqīf, to whom Muhammad granted political leverage in the new Islamic power structures.⁵⁹

Not surprisingly, Ward ibn Thaqīf is described in the romance primarily in terms of his wealth – a factor that induces Majnūn to accuse Laylā's father of selling her off to the highest bidder. Thus, even his complaints against the bartering of Laylā take on a certain allegorical significance. Perhaps his sense of betrayal embraces the motif of *ḥanīn ilā al-waṭan*, or sense of loss and abandonment, experienced by some of the Bedouin tribes after the establishment of the Islamic caliphates and its ruling dynasties.

Notes

- 1 These terms are used by Renate Jacobi, "The 'Udhra: Love and Death in the Umayyad Period," *Martyrdom in Literature: Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Friederike Pannewick (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2004), 147.
- 2 F. E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), xxi.
- 3 *Ibid.*, xxi.
- 4 S. G. Nogales, "Ibn Sina," in *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Religion Science and Learning in the 'Abbāsīd Period*, eds. R. B. Serjeant, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 395.
- 5 It is noteworthy that the mothers of most (not all) of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs were concubines and non-Arab women. This is in stark contrast to the Umayyad caliphs, the genealogies of which were mainly Arab on both sides of the parentage. Because women's histories are not easily retrievable, this remarkable fact has been little discussed in scholarly literature. Indeed the mothers of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs included women who were Berber, Persian, Armenian, Greek as well as Sicilian.
- 6 Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Early 'Abbāsīd Society, 2nd-4th/5th-10thc* (London: Routledge, 1998), 19.
- 7 Beatrice Greundler, "Al-Hanīn ilā l-Awtān and Its Alternatives in Classical Arabic Literature," in *Representations and Visions of Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Sebastian Gunther and Stephan Milich (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag AG, 2016), 18.
- 8 Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs*, xxi.
- 9 Willem Raven, *Ibn Dawūd al-Isbahānī and His Kitāb al-Zahra* (Leiden: University of Leiden Dissertation, 1989), 29–30.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 89–90.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 90. See footnote on same page.
- 12 "Another category of poets, rather more placid and respectful of the law, also sang of the desert landscapes and the loves of youth, in a poetry impregnated with melancholy. There are both poets (al-Šimma al-Kushayrī, *al-Aghānī*, vi, 1–8; Ibn Kutayba, *Shi'r*, 185–186; Abū Tammām, *al-Ḥamāsa*, index) and poetesses (Maysūn bt. Baḥdal, Hind bt. A'lam al-Sadūsiyya, Waḍiḥa bt. Aws al-Ḍabbiyya) producing treatises of *ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān*. Nevertheless, these artists were regarded as marginal and seem to have played only a very limited role in the evolution of the descriptive poetry in their time." A. Arazī and Y. Meron, "Wasf," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, eds. P. Bearman, et al., <http://dx.doi.org.ccl> (2012).
- 13 Could it be argued that both also may be different iterations of the one and same 'Abbāsīd phenomenon?
- 14 Greundler, "Al-Hanīn ilā l-Awtān," 18.
- 15 Though my view is that the *Majnūn Laylā* romance is largely and ultimately a product of the 'Abbāsīd age, that is, it is a product of that era's re-creation and re-imagining.
- 16 A. Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry: An Interpretation of the Mağnūn Legend* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1980).
- 17 See also: Julie Meisami, "Review of *Love, Madness, and Poetry: An Interpretation of the Mağnūn Legend*, by As'ad E. Khairallah," *Edebiyāt* 4, no. 2 (1979): 277–286.
- 18 In his 1993 study of the pastoral in early Arabic poetry, *The Zephyrs of Najd* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), Jaroslav Stetkevych does not identify the distinctions (pastoral vs. 'anti-pastoral') that I proceed to make in this digression.
- 19 Ruqayya Y. Khan, "Pastoralism and the 'Wild Man' in an Early Arabic Romance," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 11, no. 2 (2008).
- 20 N. Frye, *The Secular Scripture, a Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 149.
- 21 "Pastoral," J. E. Congleton, in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

- 22 Kuthayyir 'Azza, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, comp. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah al-Miṣrīyah al-'Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1992), 9: 89.
- 23 Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs*, xxi.
- 24 Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, 149.
- 25 Charles Pellat, et al., "Madjnūn Laylā," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition, eds. H. A. R. Gibb, et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill; London: Luzak and Co., 1960–1980).
- 26 Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 334–335.
- 27 George Sarton, "Review: *A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas, Volume I: Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* by Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas," *Isis* 25, no. 1 (May 1936): 170. Sarton drawing upon A. O. Lovejoy here.
- 28 Greundler, "*Al-Hanīn ilā l-Awtan*," 18.
- 29 Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry*, 2.
- 30 Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman*, 335.
- 31 "Physical traits like the free accumulation of hair or inordinately long nails. Behavioral traits as well: grass for food, Majnūn pawing like a wild horse at the approach of a human being, and a life shared with the gazelles, who no longer run away from him." Andre Miquel and Percy Kemp, *Majnūn et Laylā: l'amour fou* (Paris: Éditions Sindbad, 1984), 75.
- 32 Ibid., 50.
- 33 Hayden White, "The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea," in *Tropics of Discourse, Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985), 173.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Greundler, "*Al-Hanīn ilā l-Awtan*," 18.
- 36 Al-Iṣfahānī, "*Majnūn Laylā*," 2: 16.
- 37 Ibid., 2: 17.
- 38 Pellat, et al., "Madjnūn Laylā."
- 39 *Majnūn Laylā*, in *Aghānī*, 3. Charles Pellat points out that the "fact that historical individuals such as Nawfal b. Musāhik, governor of Medina in 83/702, are mentioned in the traditions relating to the adventures of Ḳays suggests that the latter came into existence at about this period, but this is all that can be said on the subject" (see note 26).
- 40 Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 65.
- 41 Also, see Mottahedeh's discussion of how *hilf* (confederation) among Arab tribes was challenged by Islam. Ibid., 65–70.
- 42 T. Djedadi, *La poésie amoureuse des Arabes: Le cas des 'Udrites. Contribution à une sociologie de la littérature arabe* (Algeria: Societe Nationale d'édition et de diffusion, 1974).
- 43 Stetkevych, *Zephyrs*, 115, paraphrasing Tāhā Husayn, *Ḥadīth al-Arabī'ā*, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif bi Miṣr, 1954), 216–218.
- 44 In the love story of *Qays Lubnā*, the character of a mediator rather than arbitrator is present. This mediator, represented as al-Ḥusayn, the Prophet's grandson who is held to be martyred in the late seventh century, successfully plays a role in the marriage arrangement between the two young lovers. Although the nature of the intervention as well as its outcome differ from that in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, it is noteworthy that both stories have a mediator/arbitrator figure involved in the love plot. *Qays Lubnā*, in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, comp. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, Vol. 9 (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah al-Miṣrīyah al-'Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1992), 180–249.
- 45 Stetkevych, *Zephyrs*, 116.
- 46 Ibid., 107. It is questionable that Stetkevych only uses A. Sattar's edition of the *dīwān*. He thus may be relying on verses dating from a time much later than the Umayyad period to argue for changes he claims occurred in the Umayyad period. Using the *Aghānī* version would have at least delimited his material to the tenth century.
- 47 Stetkevych, *Zephyrs*, 116.
- 48 "Another category of poets, rather more placid and respectful of the law, also sang of the desert landscapes and the loves of youth, in a poetry impregnated with melancholy.

There are both poets (al-Šimma al-Kushayrī, *al-Aghānī*³, vi, 1–8; Ibn Kutayba, *Shiʿr*, 185–186; Abū Tammām, *al-Ḥamāsa*, index) and poetesses (Maysūn bt. Baḥdal, Hind bt. Aʿlam al-Sadūsiyya, Wadīḥa bt. Aws al-Ḍabbiyya) producing treatises of *ḥanīn ilā ʿl-awṭān*. Nevertheless, these artists were regarded as marginal and seem to have played only a very limited role in the evolution of descriptive poetry in their time.” A. Arazi and Y. Meron, “Waṣf,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, eds. P. Bearman, et al., <http://dx.doi.org.ccl>.

49 *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition, s.v. “Najd.”

50 Stetkevych, *Zephyrs*, 141.

51 Ibid., 115.

52 Salma Jayyusi, “Umayyad Poetry,” in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature I: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

53 Stetkevych, *Zephyrs*, 121.

54 J. Stetkevych says of *al-ṣabā* (east wind): “*Al-ṣabā* opposes it [referring to *al-dabūr*, the west wind] with its softness, the ability to seed rain-laden clouds, and thus with fecundity. As a bearer of perfume-drenched messages from the beloved, *al-ṣabā* is also the wind of love’s promise – or remembrance – and of good tidings.” Stetkevych, *Zephyrs*, 125.

55 This translation is from A. Khairallah’s book *Love, Madness and Poetry*, 81.

56 Also on pg. 79 in the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*, there is yet another *nasīb*-like scene where Majnūn is shown ‘seeing the departure of Laylā’s caravan’ and he begins to weep.

57 Dols, *Majnūn: The Mad Man*, 333.

58 But the Thaqīf and Quraysh also became rivals in the control over certain religious sanctuaries. Vadet mentions that the Thaqīf strove to “attract their bellicose and restless neighbors, the Sa’sa’a,” to their defense.” Vadet, 83.

59 On the bad reputation of the Thaqīf, see I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. S. M. Stem, translated by from German by C. R. Barber and S. M. Stem, 2 vols (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1968–1971), 96.

6 Majnūn as the knight-errant¹

Language and the significance of errancy (*Huyām*)

Stark differences are found between two different ‘Abbāsīd theologies in *Majnūn Laylā*, one that was Eros or ‘*Ishq*-based arising out of the Greco-Arabian encounter, and another that was an Islamic Ḥanbalī law-based theology rooted in the confluence of Jewish and Muslim scriptural ideas. The issue of male ‘Abbāsīd identity formation is complex. Opposing conceptions of Eros or ‘*Ishq*-based love inform the divergence of views between two very different male ‘Abbāsīd identities concerning ‘Uḏhrī-type love and romances. The text of the *Aghānī* version of the *Majnūn Laylā* love story frames the two aforementioned theologies and ideologies in terms of such tensions and oppositions. Indeed, it uses the juxtaposition of these two theologies to inculcate ethical and moral elements. The story of *Majnūn Laylā* suggests culturally proper, normative male conduct through its interweaving of (and often tension between) these two different theologies and ideologies. Such an interweaving (and the tensions therein) also suggests a kind of circumspection and reactivity to the impact of ‘Abbāsīd translation projects as part of the Greco-Arabian encounter in Baghdad.

The very existence of these two theological dimensions and their radically opposing perspectives in the romance signifies the deep ambivalence within ‘Abbāsīd identities. This ambivalence concerned how to interpret poetry and poetic language as well as how to interpret song and dance cultures which derive from the centrality of poetry. But these two theological dimensions, as we shall see, also point to the significance of how ‘Abbāsīd male identities engage the issues of normativity as they concern the religion of Islam, and how such love stories – which were perceived as linked with iterations and representations of pre-Islamic Arabia or *al-Jāhiliyya* – aided in constructing and consolidating culturally what may be called normative Islam. Through textual engagements with and performance of tenth-century romances like *Majnūn Laylā*, ‘Abbāsīd identities sought to formulate religious lines of conduct and delineate moral boundaries. Such romances and their reception and performative aspects were part of the processes of construction and consolidation of these identities. As Nadia El-Cheikh observes: “The confrontation with *jāhiliyya* and with *jāhiliyya*’s many later incarnations was crucial for the mainstream Islamic cultural construction of itself as a religious and imperial center. The texts’ formulation of *jāhiliyya* was part of a

cultural re-orientation that took place over the course of two centuries with the aim of defining ever more sharply what it meant to be an Arab and a Muslim.”²

Yet, this “confrontation with jahiliyya” also was occurring in the context of a general response to what may have been perceived as too much of an interference from ideas and “sciences” of and from the Greek ancient masters – a reaction that then took the form of rendering prominent the singularity and originality of the Bedouin of *al-Jāhiliyya*. That is, all the achievements of pre-Islamic Arabs and Muslim Arabs were as being on par with those of the Greeks.³

The prominent ‘Abbāsīd man of letters and theologian, al-Jāḥiẓ, made his views known that *Īshq*-based songs and performances were a highly dangerous affective force for Muslim men in the city,⁴ and that ‘*Ishq*, if not properly channeled, could lead to the destruction of the Muslim self and Islamic social order.’⁵ In al-Jāḥiẓ’s ninth-century epistle on singing-girls, *Risālat al-Qiyān*, the seductiveness of the singing-girls mirrors that of their songs, and the songs are romance verses set to music. Al-Jāḥiẓ notes how Majnūn’s poetry is performed by a singing-girl as part of her repertoire of tricks and wiles employed in trapping her clients:

When she encounters [the lover’s name], she quotes Majnūn’s verse,

I love every name that is the same as hers, or like it, or in any way resembles it.

If anyone calls out the name, she quotes Majnūn’s other lines,

Often has someone called out, when we were on

Mina’s slopes, and has stirred unwittingly my heart’s griefs; he has called by the name of Laylā someone other than my love, and it was as though by [the

very word] ‘Laylā’ he caused a bird in my breast to fly up.⁶

One key line in this quotation is “if anyone calls out the name” – signals the interactive dimensions between the audience and the performer; the singing girl dangles a verse of Majnūn which immediately resonates with the ‘Abbāsīd male audiences and elicits a response. The performative qualities of Majnūn’s verses come across powerfully, and the singing girl’s repertoire of these verses allowed for a mounting, exciting exchange between courtly ‘Abbāsīd male audiences and female performer. According to al-Jāḥiẓ, ‘Abbāsīd elite masculine circles were at the forefront of this seductive wave of danger at the hands of the class of singing girls who performed, sang and recited, and seduced in these palace subcultures.

Love was a subject and topic of intense discussions during the ‘Abbāsīd era⁷ and this was in no small part due to the Greek impact – novel, powerful ideas and values from the translated sources of the Greek ancient masters flooded especially the upper echelons of Baghdadi culture. The writings concerning Eros ‘Uḍhrī-type love authored by al-Jāḥiẓ and others were part of a meta-discourse that stretched beyond the ninth and tenth centuries. There existed a powerful intertextual dimension between what may be termed the “imaginative literature on love (its poetry,

anecdotes, stories)” and the meta-discourse or “expository literature on love”.⁸ References to the ‘Uḏhrī lovers are reported in virtually all the expository treatises on love starting from the ninth century and onward to the thirteenth century. Conversely, the ideas and worldviews of this meta-discourse are woven into the tapestry of this imaginative literature, including, for instance, its poetry and narratives. Therefore, I deem it methodologically useful to draw upon and quote theologians of both the Eros and Ḥanbalī orientations irrespective of whether they chronologically precede or succeed the tenth-century rendition of the verses and narratives of *Majnūn Laylā*. In other words, this meta-discursive context permits for deep insights into the ‘Abbāsīd-era reader reception. The practitioners of this meta-discourse mainly belonged to the two theological camps spoken of earlier: that is, the Eros or ‘*Ishq*’-based and Islamic Ḥanbalī law-based theology – i.e., Muslim Eros theologians vs. orthodox Muslim Ḥanbalī theologians. Hence, in the aforementioned *The Epistle on Singing-Girls* by Muslim Eros theologian al-Jāhīz, there is both a response to and validation of accusations made by the Muslim Ḥanbalī theologians of moral laxity among the elite ‘Abbāsīd youth – laxity alleged to be linked to their exposure to these women.

Chronologically, al-Iṣfahānī’s tenth-century compendium *Kitāb al-Aghānī* or *Book of Songs* (in which we find the chapter on the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*) is situated squarely during this wave of meta-discourse unfolding between the ninth and thirteenth centuries during the ‘Abbāsīd era. Muslim Ḥanbalī theology well recognized that speech and song incited desire since listening to “amatory verse and song” was regarded by it as one of the primary causes of “falling in love.”⁹ According to the thirteenth-century Ḥanbalī-theologian Ibn al-Jawzī, “another cause [besides “looking or gazing” *naẓar*] of ‘*Ishq*’ is listening to amatory verse and song (*samā’*). This activity engraves images on the heart which the faculty of vision then proceeds to find beautiful.” Discursive activity of any sort bred desire and it was believed that “those who indulge in reading lovers’ tales, reciting delicate verse, and listening to sad music are especially vulnerable.”¹⁰

‘Abbāsīd cultural and social identity formation sought to both interrogate and inculcate proper, normative Muslim male conduct through its engagements with poetry and song, especially bedouin or *Jāhiliyya* poems and songs. As remarked earlier, there existed a deep ambivalence (which, in part, is represented by these aforementioned two opposing theological dimensions) within ‘Abbāsīd identities and the religion of Islam toward how to interpret the male desire engendered by verse and song. This ambivalence, it must be emphasized, permeates all aspects of the *Majnūn Laylā* romance genre’s construction and readings.

How, then, are these two contrasting and opposing meta-discursive ideological trends, i.e., the Muslim Eros theology vs. the Muslim Ḥanbalī theology, implicitly and explicitly framed in the poetry and song consisting of the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*? This chapter studies this through a focus upon how these two opposing theological readings are implied in the “conceptions of language” found in the romance. It pursues this through an analysis of the metaphor of *huyām* or “errancy” in the story.¹¹ The etymologies of the Arabic word *hāma* and the English word “errant,” reveal an important connection between love¹² and wandering.

I will argue that this concept of wandering (inscribed in the etymology of *huyām*) acts as a spatial metaphor for the errors of desire in language.¹³ This connection between desire and wandering that characterizes the etymology of the word *hāma* can also be viewed as a distillation of the romance genre in the medieval Arabic context. In this respect, the frequent use of the word *hāma* in the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* “reveals the capacity of romance to generate metaphors for its own description.”¹⁴

Etymology of *hāma*

The Arabic word *hāma*, from which *huyām* is derived, means “to love someone desperately,” and “to roam, rove and wander.” The expression *hāma ‘ala wajhihī*, also derived from this word, is translated as “out of love, he wandered like a madman; he wandered aimlessly.”¹⁵ By definition, *huyām* is the last stage of love and the most excessive of the excessive degrees of love in most of the meta-discourses on love, including the Arabic Eros-based theology concerning love.¹⁶ All the other prior phases of love are subsumed in this ultimate stage and to understand the degree of its incoherence, one has to note the excessiveness already of that which precedes it. Among the degrees of love prior to *huyām* are *tatayyum* (a state of enslavement to love) and *walah* (distraction or loss of reason in love). As noted already, the etymology of the word “errant,” too, demonstrates this link between passionate love and errant movement (at least up until the fifteenth century). The English “errant” taken from French derives from two Latin roots: *itin(erare)*, meaning to journey or travel and *errare*, meaning to wander, stray or err. The word “error” derived from the Latin root *errare* means among other things, “the action of roaming or a wandering; hence . . . a roving” and “a wandering of the feelings; an extravagance of passion.”¹⁷ Here again, spatial errancy is linked to a kinetics of passion. The absence of an internal coherence and a wandering of desire within the body leads to a wandering of the body as well as to other kinds of errancy.

Orthodox Ḥanbalī Islam and its theological views took these connections further: poetry and poetic language could lead to mortal errors and sins. Thus, the wanderings internal and external to the body also serve as metaphors for the errancy of language. The errors of a man’s desire become those of his language. Incidentally, a perusal of the etymologies of many Arabic words connected with language/speech contain meanings that suggest that language is somehow deviant, injurious and invasive.¹⁸ But what are the errors that language makes one prone to this according to the Orthodox view?

Huyām and the Qur’ān

To probe the Muslim Ḥanbalī theological understanding of language’s errors as well as to suggest, by contrast, what the Eros-based view of them was, we turn to a famous Qur’ānic verse in which the use of the verb *hāma* (related to the word *huyām*) acts as a spatial metaphor for linguistic errors. In effect this is the single

Qur'anic instance of the use of this particular word.¹⁹ The verse also bears many resonances with the persona of Majnūn in this romance. In the Chapter of the Poets, God declares:

And as for the poets – it is the erring ones who follow them.
Do you not see how in every valley, they wander aimlessly [*hāmū*].
And that they speak of what they do not do?²⁰

The verse's application of *hāma* to poets such as Majnūn is of great import for an understanding of the errors of language as perceived by both the Eros-based and Ḥanbalī-based Islamic theological currents. This application posits the tie between language, on the one hand, and desire and pleasure, on the other hand. The poets' *huyām* would seem to be a function of their craft. Just as *huyām* is conceived of as an excess or extravagance of desire, likewise poetry is imagined as an extravagance of language, and significantly, it is this extravagance that yields desire.²¹

For the Muslim Eros-based theology, this aspect of language is pleasurable because it celebrates desire but is also painfully tragic because it results in an endless deferral of desire's fulfillment. For orthodox Muslim Ḥanbalī-based theology, this excessive literariness or an over-abundance of tropes in poetic language is blameworthy because it is deception or untrue speech that leads one astray. The Qur'anic verse 6:112, for instance, states: "We made for every prophet an enemy, the evil ones from among men and jinn. They suggest one to another gilded speech [*zukhruf al-qawl*] in order to deceive." Such "gilded speech" can be blameworthy because it is deceptively tempting and for its proclivity toward pleasurable excesses.²² But desire also is condemned by them as sinful for its privileging of a human over a divine referent.

The prominence of language in this Qur'anic verse is further underscored by use of the word "valley" or *wāḍin* which generally means "an intervening space," as the "space between mountains or hills," but in addition to a geographical space, it can also be construed with reference to language.²³ It denotes both terrestrial land and speech/language (*wāḍī al-kalām*).²⁴ In fact, al-Ṭabarī, a famous 'Abbāsīd Muslim tenth-century commentator, in his exegesis of this verse, conveys an exegesis of *wāḍin* primarily in its linguistic sense. Commenting on poets, he variously renders it as: "In every slip/mistake of language, they are complicit." (*fī kulli laghwin yakhda'ūna*). "In every mode [of speech], they diversify and embellish." (*fī kulli fannin yaftannūna*); "In every manner [of discourse], they meander," (*fī kulli fannin, yahimūna*).²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, as a recognized Muslim exegete and historian, through this verse, implies that the Qur'anic verse condemns the rhetorical or tropological dimensions of language. On the basis of al-Ṭabarī's interpretation, it seems that the verse especially denigrates poetic and rhetorical diversity in modes of composition and the multiplicity of genres. By speaking pejoratively of all the different *ṭurūq al-qawl* (the ways and methods of speech) or what the ninth-century literary critic and anthologist Ibn Qutayba defines as tropes or *majāzāt*, God seems to be accusing poets of precisely what they accused the prophet of: that their speech is

a bundle of lies.²⁶ He faults poetry for being errant language, for being language that roams because it is not subject to referential restraint. Poetry, more than most modes of discourse, is caught up in the infinite play of signifier as trope. This wandering and over-abundance of literariness in poetry is considered by the Qur'ān to be a form of deception: “[poets] speak of what they do not do.”²⁷ Again, what is being denigrated is the literariness of language.

The Qur'ānic verse assigns blame to the ability of poetic language to deceive, to conceal, and to be at variance with a presumed truth or reality. But Muslim Ḥanbalī-based orthodoxy's criticism of language's ability to conceal also stemmed from its concern over poetry's effectiveness in revealing, exposing or (de)constructing public selves. The magnitude of God's condemnation betrayed precisely what Islamic orthodoxy desired to hide: the power of poetic language. For the Arabs, poetry was a most effective rhetorical weapon, a weapon at the hands of which the prophet Muhammad's reputation had suffered. Many of those wishing to discredit the prophet Muhammad insisted that the Qur'ān, too, because it contained *majāz* (tropical speech), was untrue because “*majāz was kadhīb*.”²⁸ Moreover, invective and satire became especially prominent in the early Islamic Umayyad period, as we have seen already, and both individual and collective reputations were frequently and irreparably destroyed through the recitation and circulation of poetry.

Fundamentally, God implies that only His speech (language with a divine referent) is devoid of falsehood and artifice. Qur'ānic revelation as divine speech is thus the fixed text to which, in Suzanne Stetkevych's words, “the *qaṣīdah* [the ode] played profane anti-text.”²⁹ Importantly, the verse's admonition that poets should not deviate from a perceived reality or truth contradicted the more Greek-inflected prevailing theory of Arabic poetics which separated poetry as artistic form from reality or personal experience: what mattered was the form, the artistry or craftsmanship and not any reality or truth behind the poetry. Qudāma ibn Ja'far expressed it thus: *aḥṣan al-shi'r akdhabuhu* or the ‘best of poetry is the most lying poetry.’³⁰ Hence, this Qur'ānic condemnation anticipates a rejection of a more Greek-influenced theory of Arabic poetics as recognized and written by literary critics in the 'Abbāsīd empire (e.g., 'Abbāsīd literary critic Qudāma ibn Ja'afar). Indeed, the aforementioned exegesis of *wāḍin* by al-Ṭabarī, the prominent 'Abbāsīd Muslim commentator, communicates something of an overall Arab Muslim reaction to what may have been perceived as the foreignness of the ideas and “sciences” from the Greek ancient masters and philosophers, including Aristotle – a reaction that expressed itself as rendering prominent the theological uniqueness and originality of the Qur'ānic divine language over and above the literariness of human language. In other words, again, the religio-cultural achievements of Muslim Arabs, especially of their prophet, surpassed those of the ancient “heathen” Greek masters.

Orthodox Muslim Ḥanbalī-based theology held that it is language's non-veridical (that is, tropological) dimensions that cause poets to deviate morally and wander. Yet, ‘if language itself is at fault for not conveying truth, then the distinction between a lying poet and a truthful poet no longer exists and God's

condemnation may be extended to a rejection of all poets.³¹ Also, by censuring poets for luxuriating in the play (*lahw*) of language's signifiers, God imputes moral culpability to the pleasure they derive from this.

On another level, for 'Abbāsīd-era constructions of *al-Jāhiliyya*, it was not just about the literariness of language but also about how this pre-Islamic poetic heritage shaped the past and present. Poetry was the vehicle for remembering and understanding the cultural ethos in which the religion originated, but also poetry was ineluctably linked with the 'Abbāsīd-era exegesis of the Qur'ān. Rina Drory argues that:

Poets, transmitters and scholars, all claim professional competence for preserving the ancient poetry and authority over its transmission. The debate is actually about authority over the past, since the poetry was the principal vehicle for representing the past. This was one of its central and traditional functions as early as the days of Jāhiliyya, and a major source of conflict between the Jāhili poets and the Prophet Muhammad.³²

Nearly all forms of alterity were juxtaposed against the 'Abbāsīd-era constructions and interpretations of *al-Jāhiliyya*: *al-Jāhiliyya* was impetuosity and unrestraint, whereas "Islam" as founded by Muhammad was patience and restraint; *al-Jāhiliyya* was lie, Islam was truth; *al-Jāhiliyya* was pagan, Islam was puritanically monotheist; *al-Jāhiliyya* was hedonistic, Islam was ascetic. To quote El Cheikh again: "the narrative that Muslims gradually constructed was that the rise of Islam, that original moment of purity, brought about the elimination of the impurity and corruption of the pre-Islamic "time of ignorance" (*jāhiliyya*)."³³ Implicit and explicit debates about poetry and poetics, and about the literariness of language consisted of an underlay to this 'Abbāsīd-era cultural construction of *al-Jāhiliyya* and with it the construction of 'Abbāsīd-era normative Islam.

For the Muslim Eros-based theological discourse, the errors of language are unrelated to a phenomenology outside of language – they have nothing to do with considerations of truth and falsehood, good and evil. This theology recognizes that an individual's desire is constituted and celebrated in and through language. But this Eros-based discourse decries language as tragically errant for two reasons. First, it deems tragic the fact that an individual inevitably has to reveal and express his/her desire since it is constituted in and through expression or linguistic expression. Second, language is tragically errant because it causes the satisfaction of desire to be perpetually deferred. According to the Muslim Eros-based theology, the evanescence of the love object, that occurs once desire is expressed through poetic language, means that fulfillment is unattainable. Paradoxically, those very tropological poetic dimensions of language that yield desire and pleasure are also the ones that result in the evanescence of the pleasure and therefore, they also engender pain.

Importantly, for both the Muslim Eros-based and orthodox Ḥanbalī-based theologies, *huyām* as errancy in the sense of roaming and wandering is inextricably linked to linguistic errancy. The errancy of language and desire causes those that craft language, the poets, to wander morally, mentally and geographically.

For Islamic mystical discourses, the significance of *huyām* needs to be further assessed. It is fascinating that Muḥammad al-Daylamī's late tenth-century treatise on mystical love, the Arabic title of which is *Kitāb 'atf al-alif al-ma'lūf 'alā al-lām al-ma'tūf* (translated as *Book of the Conjunction of the Cherished Alif with the Conjoined Lam*) only discusses *huyām* in relation to *Majnūn Laylā* (although it is unclear which rendition of the love story he used). He appears to transmit sets of Majnūn's verses not found in the *Aghānī* version of *Majnūn Laylā*. Here is what al-Daylamī states:

The word *hayamān* is derived from *huyām*, which is a disease afflicting camels in which they can never get enough to drink and finally die of thirst. Hence Majnūn of the Banū 'Amir said:

I am sick with love, and the wandering disease (*huyām*) has struck me.
Stay away from me so you will not catch what I have.

And he also said:

I am like the camel afflicted with the wandering disease. No water quenches her dryness (*sadā*), nor does her disease bring her death.³⁴

What is noteworthy regarding al-Daylamī's discussion in this regard is that his stance or position on *huyām* falls somewhere between Muslim Eros-based and orthodox Ḥanbalī-based theologies, but appears to be closer to the latter. The framing of *huyām* in relation to the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* in this mystical treatise draws upon the only other Qur'anic use of a word related to *huyām*, namely *al-hīm* (Qur'an 56:55), "in which those who err and deny the revealed message are promised a punishment in which they will lap up boiling water as though they were thirsty camels (*al-hīm*)."

Huyām as linguistic errancy

Here, six passages from the *Aghānī* version of *Majnūn Laylā* romance are quoted in which the use of the word *hāma* occurs. Nearly all these passages show Majnūn's geographical errancy to be preceded by emotional excesses that are linked to linguistic utterances. In the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, the internal vagrancy of emotion or desire is coterminous with a vagrancy of language, but it is language that precedes desire. Linguistic errancy results ultimately in geographic errancy. Situated between these two poles and significantly, mapped out on a terrestrial topography, are all the other forms of errancy, including physical, moral, spiritual, mental, and social forms. The errors of the ear/tongue become the errors of the heart and mind and all ultimately lead to those of the road.

The first instance of the use of *hāma* occurs in Majnūn's father's account of his son's excessive reaction after Laylā recites verses to him in secret and about secrets.

Both of us appear in front of people
to hate each other

and yet each is entrenched with his friend.
The secrets of the glancer are not hidden
if the eyes disclose what he conceals.

[Hearing this], he fell into a swoon and arose having lost his senses. He [began to] not wear any garment except rags, and to walk about naked. . . . If Laylā was mentioned to him, he would start talking rationally about her, without committing any errors in his words. He forsook the ritual prayer and when it was said to him: what is the matter with you that you don't pray, he would not respond with [even] a word. We used to confine and chain him, and then he [resorted to] biting his tongue and lips until fearing for him, we let him go his way. And so, he madly wanders [*fa-huwa yahīmu*].

(16)

The second time *hāma* is used in the romance is after Majnūn's hearing a crier cry out the word "Laylā." He hears the shouting of her name while journeying with his father to perform pilgrimage, and immediately this has an impact upon him. So much so that arriving at the Ka'aba with his father moments later, Majnūn subverts the rite of pilgrimage by beseeching God to intensify love's affliction, rather than asking for relief from it: "O God, increase my love for and addiction to Laylā and do not cause me to ever forget her memory!"

Whereupon he wandered [*hāma*] deliriously and became disordered. He could not take control of himself. [They said] he used to roam madly [*yahīmu*] on earth with the beasts, not eating save what was growing in the ground by way of herbage and not drinking except with the gazelles when they came to their watering-places. The hair on his body and head grew long and the gazelles and wild beasts became accustomed to him and did not fear him. He began to roam until he reached the borders of al-Shām and when he regained his senses, he would ask passers-by of the tribes of the Arabs, "Which way to the Najd?" It would be said to him: *what do you have to do with the Najd? You are practically in the Shām. You are in such-and-such place.* He would say: *Show me the way [to the Najd].* They took mercy on him and offered to give him a mount, or some clothes, but he refused. They directed him toward the Najd and he headed that way.

(22)

In the third instance, the expression *hāma 'ala wajhihī* is employed after Majnūn raves about Laylā in front of his family, the latter having just counseled him to forget her.

In the beginning of his affair, Majnūn used to see Laylā and frequent her company, and have close ties with her. Then she was made to disappear from his gaze. His folk sought to console him over her, saying: "We will marry you to the comeliest maiden from your kin clan [but] he refused [any] except Laylā." He used to rave deliriously about her, and mention her by name. (On

occasion, he would accede to their wishes and calm down upon hearing their words to him.) At other times, grief and anxiety were stirred up in him and, he could not control what was within him, [to prevent him from] madly roving and wandering [*an yahīma 'ala wajhihī*]. This was before he became savage and wild, [living] with, the beasts in the desert wasteland. His folk used to blame and censure him.

(42)

Fourth, the same expression is found in a narrative describing how Majnūn recalls the days he and Laylā as children used to pasture their families' flocks at Mount Ṭaubad.

When he recalled the days he and Laylā used to go around it [the mountain], he felt intense grief and loneliness, and so he roamed aimlessly like a madman [*hāma 'a la wajhihī*] until he reached the boundaries of al-Shām. When reason returned to him, he saw a country he did not know and he said to the people he encountered: I implore you, where is Mount al-Ṭaubad in the land of Banū 'Āmir? It was said to him: You are nowhere near the land of Banū 'Āmir. You are in al-Shām. Head toward so-and-so star and go that way. He would go on in the direction of that star until he found himself in the land of Yemen. Seeing a country he was ignorant of and people with whom he was unfamiliar, he would inquire of them about al-Ṭaubad and the land of Banū 'Āmir. They said: You are nowhere near Banū 'Āmir territory. Steer toward such-and-such star. Thus, he did not cease until he arrived at al-Ṭaubad.

(52)

Fifth, meaning appears in a narrative following a recitation, by the poet, of a couplet in which he faults God for the trial to which he is subjected as a consequence of the loss of his beloved. As soon as Majnūn declaims these verses:

It was called out in the night: *you are the one ungrateful of God's decree and rebellious of his commands*. Then, he lost his mind and he became wild and unsociable since that night and he has roamed aimlessly with the beasts [*dha-haba ma'l-wahsh 'ala wajhihī*].

(68)

The sixth time that *hāma* is used is in a variant of the aforementioned account by the poet's father of the love affair between his son and Lay lā:

When the matter between him and her was disclosed, her father resented having to marry her to him after the revelation of the news. So he married her to one other than him. Thus, my son lost his reason and madness overcame him, and he wandered madly in the desert spaces [*wa-hāma fī al-fayāfī* . . .].

(88)

In many of these narratives, his raving leads to his roving. Language – whether it is Majnūn’s hearing his beloved’s verses or the crier’s utterance of her name or his family’s admonitions – leads him to rove and roam. Whether it is Majnūn himself reciting scandalous verses about Laylā or his raving to God and his family – his words and speech acts are depicted as the cause of his deviation into other forms of errancy.

It is the tropological qualities of language that instigate the manifestation of Majnūn’s desire and passion in these passages. As just discussed with reference to the Qur’ānic verse on poets, poetic language with its fullness and richness of tropes, its wandering signifiers, seduces both those who craft/perform and listen to it. In the first passage from the romance, it is listening to Laylā’s poetry that unmasks Majnūn’s passion and desire. In both the first and second passages, it is hearing the word “Laylā” (that is, the crier’s cry of the name “Laylā”) that intensifies Majnūn’s desire rather than hearing the divine word. Here Majnūn’s tragic fault is his own proclivity for always being consumed by Laylā and jealousy at hearing others pronounce her name (trope). But an orthodox strain constructs him as a sinner and idolater for experiencing rapture through hearing speech (that is, Laylā’s secrets, her name) that is without a divine referent.

A Ḥanbalī-based theological discourse foregrounds Majnūn’s sin being overwhelming, uncontrolled desire and passion instigated through wandering of tropes or wandering of the eyes. Orthodox Islamic Ḥanbalī love theorists held gazing to be the primary cause of desire. The famous theologian Ibn al-Jawzī declares: “Looking . . . is only permissible in the absence of desire. . . . He who claims that he experiences no desire is a liar. . . . It is clear, however, from the words of Ibn Dāwūd, that he did not hold *naẓar* [gazing] to be forbidden. In this he was mistaken . . . the error led first to his disgrace before the people, and finally, to his death.”³⁵ In the following lines (found at the beginning of the afore-cited third passage), a direct causal link is posited between Majnūn as looker and gazer and Laylā as the one absented from his sight: “In the beginning of his affair, Majnūn used to see Laylā and frequent her company as well as have close ties with her. Then she was made to disappear from his gaze.” Since the origin of this sinful intimacy lies in his imaging of her through his eyes, her image must be made to vanish from his gaze.

Returning to the first passage, we read that when Laylā is mentioned to Majnūn, he recites faultless poetry, “without any erring of word,” whereas when he is asked why he has abandoned prayer, he utters “not [even] a word.” An orthodox Islamic strain inserts a double-note of irony in the narrative through this contrast. First, Majnūn is portrayed as being unerringly voluble in language that is highly erring and lying (poetry). Second, his fluency in poetic speech or imperfect language is compared with his muteness when asked to utter prayer that privileges the perfection of divine language. On the other hand, an Eros-based subtext valorizes the rhetorical dimensions of language through, this juxtaposition. In the first instance, mention of Laylā as trope incites Majnūn’s desire which, then generates his poetry (more tropes). In the second instance, neither desire nor words are incited (Majnūn is speechless) – rather, the reference to prayer evokes antipathy toward tropological language.

Also, Majnūn's verbal outbursts, whether it is his indiscretions in poetry about Laylā (sixth passage) or his raving before God at the sacred Islamic shrine, the Ka'aba, or in the couplet in which he complains to God about his trial (second and fifth passages) or his raving before his family (third passage) – all of these exemplify language that is out of control. His raving, in each passage, is followed and caused by vagrancies internal and external to the body. Majnūn's inability to control his own emotions and behavior symbolizes his lack of control over language. *Huyām* acts as a spatial metaphor for the errancies of body and language, and as a metaphor, it conforms to both the Ḥanbalī-based and Eros-based courtly theological strains. Raving, whether it is interpreted as tragic revelation or deviant language, is the primary error.

The theme of language's errancy in the constitution of desire, too, is rehearsed in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance. Through a foregrounding of language's role in the origin of desire, the romance implies a critique of this role. For example, the story shows that the very genesis of Majnūn's desire for Laylā is constituted in language. One of the narratives describing how Majnūn falls in love with Laylā relates that she was described (this represents the *Wasf* subgenre, verb used is *nu'itat lahu*):

Al-Majnūn was addicted to the conversation of women and enamored of them. News of her [Laylā] reached him and she was described to him (*nu'itat lahū*). Then he fell in love with her and resolved to visit her

(44–45)

A Ḥanbalī-based theological strain blames Majnūn for being a linguistic subject and “agent” (for pleasurably trading in language as a poet). The position of language as epistemologically highly suspect and volatile becomes that of its subject/agent. He is sinfully privileging of tropes over “truth.” If the tropological nature of language (that is, its referent-less nature) renders it impervious to considerations of truth and falsehood as well as good and evil, then Majnūn, whose identity and vocation is based in his poetic craft, and for whom the rhetorical dimension of language is indispensable, is morally damned. The courtly Eros-based theological subtext does not fault Majnūn for experiencing desire. For the purposes of this chapter, what it decries is that this desire inevitably will remain unfulfilled and its satisfaction perpetually will be deferred. Majnūn's desire is tragically errant because his quest to satisfy this desire will never succeed.

Huyām as locomotive errancy

The Muslim Eros-based theologian, Ibn Dāwūd, who was very receptive to Greek ideas concerning love and desire, explored the ideas of desperate love and errant movement (*huyām*) in his treatise titled *Kitāb al-Zahra*. He expressed the theological view that the geographical wandering of the (male) body represented, on an external level, the physiological/psychic wandering within the body or the internal

dissolution of boundaries and destruction of coherence. According to him, desire unfolds as a disorder of the bodily humors that leads to mental disturbance:

Desire which is born in the heart . . . [leads to] the burning of blood and the inflammation of yellow bile and its transformation into black bile. From the stirring of the bile, [comes] the disorder of thought. With disorder of thought, there occurs the dullness of the intellect and damage to the mind as well as the hoping for what cannot be and the desiring of cannot be achieved . . . until this leads to madness.³⁶

Ibn Dāwūd constructs a metaphor that spatially correlates mental disorientation with geographical disorientation – an aimless and endless roaming of the body. In fact, here the lover's wandering is connected to the Neo-Platonic idea of love as a state that is a remedy for the cosmological errancy of lovers' souls.³⁷ As will be seen, the "hoping for what cannot be [fantasy] and the desiring of what cannot be achieved [wandering of desire or the postponement of desire's fulfillment]," are very significant aspects of *huyām*. In sum, then, *huyām* as wandering may be viewed as a spatial metaphor of the vagrancies within the body and mind.

Majnūn's error of desire proliferates into other errors in the course of the story. The errancy of language/desire ultimately causes Majnūn literally to roam in the wilderness of the desert, where all his other errors are mapped out. Land overshadows language and desire as the topography upon which his errancy is both inscribed and curtailed, and as will be seen shortly, the multivalency of the word "*al-Najd*" plays an important role in the examination of his errancy.

An orthodox Ḥanbalī-based theological strain constructs the *huyām* of *Majnūn Laylā*'s main character primarily as a moral trial, as a case of being morally tested and geographically lost in the wilderness of sin. This construction supports Patricia Parker's observation of romance being "that mode or tendency which remains on the threshold before the promised end, still in the wilderness of wandering, 'error,' or 'trial.'"³⁸

Majnūn's *huyām* is mapped out on land, specifically on the topography between the regions of al-Shām and al-Yemen. The Najd essentially signifies the "elevated and conspicuous road" or path. In the second and fourth passages cited earlier, the depiction of Majnūn as lost or astray in the space between these two opposing geographical peripheries, without being able to find the way out (despite the path's conspicuousness), mirrors his spiritual and moral bewilderment. His geographic roaming from al-Shām to al-Yemen symbolizes not just the fluctuations (lows and highs) in his myriad other states of being but also foregrounds his spiritual and moral liminality.

It is noteworthy that Majnūn's journeying or "adventure as trial" is mapped out on the female body and this exemplifies Susan Crane's statement that medieval romance "configures women as a ground of adventure through their contradictions and unknowability."³⁹

Besides the lover's wandering, the only other form of the lover's locomotion in the romance consists of his visits to and partings from the beloved. Actually,

these are the locomotive counterpart to the linguistic aspect in the medieval Arabic courtship ritual. Just as the lover's discursive identity and performance play an important role in engendering his desire, a locomotive execution – a going and coming, a journeying to and fro – is also an important element of it.⁴⁰ The visit is an important part of the lover's quest for pleasure, as Majnūn indicates.

There is no good in the world if you do not visit the beloved and if he does not delight in you.

(64)

Yet, if the lover's poetry is errant language, the lover's visits/partings are also deviant or errant movement. As is true of *huyām*, this locomotive aspect of courtship also becomes a spatial metaphor for the errancy of language. The polysemy of the Arabic words *zāra* (to visit) and *hajara* (to part), words that are integral to courtly love's lexicon, is very instructive in this regard. The root of the word *hajara* embraces the following meanings: "to part, forsake" as well as "to speak deliriously, to speak nonsense, to use unseemly speech." The root of the word *zāra* includes meanings of "to incline, turn aside, deviate" as well as "to embellish, falsify, counterfeit."⁴¹ First, the fact that both these words concerned with the lover's movement contain linguistic valences suggests that indeed locomotion is a spatial metaphor for language in the courtship ritual. Second, these meanings demonstrate how spatial errancy is connected with discursive errancy. Embellishments and artifice (concealment) are connected with movement toward the beloved, whereas inappropriate, unseemly expression (manifestation) is linked with movement away from the beloved.⁴² Hence, separation or divergence between lovers functions as a spatial or locomotive metaphor for linguistic revelation (the classic verb for separation in the courtly love lexicon is *bāna* which means "to part, be separated," but whose root also includes the meaning "to become evident, plain") and visitation acts as a metaphor for secrecy. The locomotion between lovers (for example, the visit, the tryst), like linguistic correspondence, must take place in secret. While the tragedy of language is its manifestation of that which it secretes, movement is also tragically errant in its tendency toward difference and rupture. In Majnūn's verses cited here, locomotion in the form of severance (parting) and flight are syntactically and symbolically linked with revelation, bitterness, and death:

Shall I sever the cord of union? death be less [intolerable]
 Or shall I drink an undrinkable bitter draught from you
 Or shall I flee until I see no neighbors
 Or what should I do? Shall I reveal and be overcome?

(20)

If spatial movement is a metaphor for the errancy of language, then one would expect that the romance would also render society's attempt to control this errancy through spatial images. Exactly this occurs: society's attempt to contain

Majnūn's errors occurs through a curbing of his movement. It is significant, given the etymology of *zāra*, that this curtailment takes the form of Majnūn as being banned from visiting his beloved. The ban on his ability to visit is a symbolic enactment of a ban on his ability to versify (which, according to a morally didactic strain, is equated with lying and concealing). Laylā is rendered spatially invisible to him (his gaze circumscribed, his desire contained). The weight of social authority in this measure to punish Majnūn's errancy is underscored by the authorities' support of her family in enforcing this ban. For the poet, restriction of spatial access to woman as object of desire translates into restriction on freedom of movement on land. Thus, when the beloved is veiled or enclosed, the spatial world of the poet-lover likewise narrows, yet another link between a woman and land found in the romance. Linguistic errors let loose his movement to the beloved (land widens) and punishment of these errors reigns in this movement (land narrows). Having been prohibited from visiting Laylā, Majnūn recites:

As if the mountain-roads were the circle of a ring
around me, never increasing in length or breadth.
(93)

Mountainous terrain, as a spatial metaphor for revelation, is the site at which his world is narrowed.

On the other hand, the romance reveals how the curtailment of Majnūn's movement toward his beloved also intensifies his (forcibly imposed) movement afar from the beloved: visiting restricted/wandering unleashed. As the third passage cited shows, an attempt to contain the poet's excesses around the center or his beloved results in his vagrancies at the periphery, that is, on and beyond the margins of society/Najd.

But even more restrictive than the ban on visitation of the beloved are the consequences of the sultan's edict making Majnūn's blood legal. In effect, this edict deprives Majnūn of all the rights to protection traditionally due to him as a tribal member. Theoretically, it makes him a marked man in his homeland, and thereby considerably circumscribes the poet's movement on land. Society's containment of his movement on land thus becomes a metaphor for its attempt to curtail his errant desire and language. The presence of this motif of the sultan's edict in at least three 'Uḏhrī romances, including *Majnūn Laylā*, shows how the myriads of errors (for example, social, spiritual, moral, geographical) resulting from errancy in desire/language are punished through restriction of locomotion. The idea of a withdrawal of social protection accorded to the individual is common to this restriction.⁴³

The deprivation of tribal protection renders the itin(erant) lover completely liminal. The deprivation is both a cause and a result of his being socially, morally and spatially astray in this romance. His journeying becomes full of dangers due to this lack of social protection. The motif of travel (*riḥla*) as danger and liminality in the romance is analogous to the poet-lover's trial or liminality in the moral

sense. In the following couplet, Laylā invokes social protection for her itin(erant) lover during his return journey to her.

Would that I knew, while dangers are so many
when Qays's camel will be set off for return
May my soul be ransom for the one who does not prepare his camel,
and the one who is led astray if God does not protect him.

(87)

Majnūn's character too is shown to be well aware of the gravity of these dangers, as is evident from the verses here. These verses are preceded by an anecdote that describes how he and his folk during a journey reach a fork, a branch of which is frequently traveled upon by Laylā's menfolk and the taking of which entails another day's travel. Majnūn asks his folk to turn (deviate) with him toward this branch in the fork but they refuse. He then goes on by himself, chanting:

And should I leave Laylā when there is nothing between
me and her save one night's journey; indeed, I would then
be patient.
Assume that I am a man from among you who has led his
camel astray
[Yet] he has a contract of protection, indeed this right due
is great
But the friend who has been left behind is [surely] more of an
obligation . . . than [the case of] a camel going astray
May God forgive Laylā today, indeed she has gone astray
[she has acted] wrongfully, if she condemns me to die of
love.

(75)

The two branches of the fork symbolize the two meta-discourses interwoven in the romance: one branch, representing the Eros-based theology, is less acceptable because it involves a digression (an errant rather than a straight path), but for the lover it is preferable and pleasurable because it leads him to his beloved. What is noteworthy is how Majnūn alternates between invoking both the traditional tribal values (contract of protection, honor) and the norms of Eros-based conceptions of love (journey toward the beloved, dying of love) in his reproaches of his folk for not joining him on the road to her. By drawing attention to both the protection due to him and the honor of his beloved, he bolsters his argument that they (his kin) have erred in not agreeing to accompany him on the journey to meet with Laylā.

As the errant poet-lover, Majnūn also takes pleasure in foregoing the comforts and protections of society for the sake of his passion. He recites the following verses after Laylā secretly swears to him that she will not "sit in the company of a man other than you until I die, unless I am compelled to do it." Hearing these

words from his beloved, he departs “the happiest and most relieved of men,” saying:

I think that passion [*hawāha*] for her will leave me in a
wilderness without goods, without a family.
Without anyone to turn to with my last will and testament.
With only my camel and saddle as friends.
My love for her has eclipsed the love for others before her and taken a place
which nothing before had taken.

(46)

The narrative ascribes happiness to Majnūn yet the verses exhibit a mixture of both elation and tragic despondency. The irony of this contrast between narrative and verses is accentuated through, an examination of the valences of the key words in his verses. Already present in the semantics of the word for “passion” (*hawā*) is the concept of error. Lois Giffen has discussed how there are two basic senses in which *hawā* is used in the meta-discourse found in medieval Arabic love treatises: the pagan Bedouin sense of “love” [appropriated by and in the Muslim Eros-based theology] and an Islamic [Ḥanbalī-based theological] sense of “evil desire.”⁴⁴ The word *ahwā*, derived from *hawā*, means “opinions swerving from the right way” and *ahl al-ahwā* means “people of erroneous opinions.” In the Qur’ān, one finds repeated mention of *ahwā*, of desires that lead one astray.⁴⁵ The word for “wilderness” (*maḍalla*) in these verses is also translated as “error, confusion, misleading country.” Thus, Majnūn’s characterization emerges as symbolically ambivalent as a result of this irony: he is both the tragically itin(erant) and sinfully wayward lover-poet.

Huyām as errancy of desire

An important idea here, as we have analyzed, is the notion of “the errors of language and desire.” We notice that the lover continually postpones arriving at any destination, continually defers attaining his goal in his romance quest. The itinerancy (*huyām*) of the lover-poet in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance is like that of the brigand-poet (*su’lūk*) who “journeys repeatedly and habitually, never arriving at a destination, a perpetual passenger in a transitional state.”⁴⁶ This romance, in contrast to the tribal pre-Islamic ode but like *ṣa’alīk* poetry, substitutes social liminality for social aggregation. In the pre-Islamic ode, the quest motif or the journeying (*rāhil*) aimed and arrived at a “destination” – its *rāhil* culminated in the *fakhr* section that celebrated the poet’s re-integration with his tribe. The pre-Islamic poet’s embarking on the desert-journey was a “heroic quest” that was ultimately realized.⁴⁷ On the other hand, in the ‘Uḍhrī stories, as in *sa’alīk* poetry, the quest becomes an end in itself.⁴⁸ It is not that a destination is not longed for – Majnūn constantly longs to reach the Najd and Laylā. But it is the longing or desiring that is ultimately valued rather than reaching the destination. In the intersecting realms of romance, song and poetry, ‘Abbāsīd courtly elite audiences enjoyed this

privileging of *'Ishq* (passionate longing and love) over *waṣl* (arrival or consummation), whereas Ḥanbalī theologians deemed this to be problem bordering on the sinful.

Postponement of arrival at a destination acts as a spatial metaphor for a deferral of desire's attainment. In the beginning of this chapter, we cited Ibn Dāwūd's phrase, "the desiring of cannot be achieved" as an important trait of *huyām*. This is a wandering of Majnūn's desire. In the following verses, the hopelessness of attainment does not prevent desire from wandering. The lover continues to recall nostalgically the beloved even if she remains inaccessible.

O Beauty of the World, which my desires are unable to attain,
and the parting of whom is not apparent to my heart . . .
The soul does not refrain from remembrance of you
for even a moment
Even if I at times chastise it much.

(84)

Just how strong is desire's tendency to roam can be seen in the striking passage cited that follow. In this passage, we note that Majnūn quite self-consciously wants to cultivate and prolong his desire, even if this may entail the wandering of that desire from Laylā to other women, from one love object to the other objects of desire.

A [group] of women sat with Majnūn and said to him: What is it that has led you to permit yourself [to do] such things as you have desired to do . . . [for the sake of] passion for Laylā? Indeed she is a woman among women. Would you consider diverting your desire from her to one of us [so that] we can help you and compensate you for your passion and [thus] that which has lapsed from your mind and body returns? Then he said them: Were I able to divert desire from her to you, I would turn it away from her and from each one after her (*wa 'an kulli ahadin ba'daha*) and would live among people, harmoniously and with ease.

(82)

Majnūn's response in it is a curious and significant statement which shows us to what degree his character is highly aware of the reasons for its own liminality. In effect, he very self-consciously suggests to his audiences (including his 'Abbāsīd and beyond readers) that what renders him tragic, what makes him unable to live as a social being is that he cannot shift his desire away from not just Laylā but even from other women who may follow her. What is the difference between "Laylā" on the one hand, and "others after her," including the women of the group? According to the women in the group, there ought not to be any difference: "Indeed she [Laylā] is a woman among women." Through this statement, they seem to be encouraging Majnūn to dethrone his beloved, to view her not as a remote and perfect ideal but as any other flesh-and-blood woman. But Majnūn

proclaims that he can never channel his desire toward any woman from among or beyond the 'group of women.'

The women are shown offering Majnūn a different kind of love relation, one in which desire does not feed on the absence or deferral of fulfillment but rather on the presence of a kind of healing satisfaction or compensation. Their question sets up an opposition between the afflictive nature of his fixation on Laylā and the curative nature of a possible relation with one or more of them. A causal connection is posited between a requited love ("compensate you for your passion") and a bodily and mental rehabilitation ("that which has lapsed from . . . mind and body returns"). In the use of the verb "to compensate" (*jazā*) in this passage, there are perhaps sexual connotations. The women explicitly ask Majnūn: "Would you consider diverting your desire from her to one of us [so that] we can help you and compensate you for your passion and [thus] that which has lapsed from your mind and body returns?" The 'Uḏhrī lover-poet, Jamīl uses this same verb when he propositions Buthaynah. By employing this verb and asking Majnūn "to divert his passion (*hawā*) from [Laylā] to one of them," the women offer him the possibility of an intimacy with one or more of them. In effect, Majnūn is being asked to end his fixation on an unrequited passion in order to accept a requited love.

What is significant is that Majnūn refuses the women's offer not out of fidelity to his beloved (for he hints at the possibility of other women being the objects of his desire after his affair with Laylā) but rather because he does not wish for the fulfillment of desire. He responds by acknowledging that he is unable to live in ease as a communal person precisely because of his inability to stop the "hoping for what cannot be and the desiring of what cannot be achieved." Importantly, Majnūn thus invokes even if indirectly Ibn Dāwūd's description of *ʿIshq*, and by implication, manifold links with Islamic mystical discourses and their notions of *nafs* (or the ego, self). Ostensibly, he describes himself as having no choice in the matter ("were I able to . . . I would turn away") thus implying that he is somehow compelled into forever postponing desire's fulfillment.

Majnūn's reference to "each one after her" (*wa 'an kulli ahadin ba'daha*), is a slip that strongly contradicts the lover's stance throughout the romance and hence, it deserves further scrutiny. In the romance, Majnūn's posture is such that we are led to believe that Laylā is his one and only beloved. In fact, the entire 'Uḏhrī corpus of love stories is considered to be about monogamous love affairs. In the love story of *Jamīl Buthayna* there is a narrative which has resonances with the one cited concerning Majnūn, and Jamīl's response is similar to that of Majnūn, but importantly, Jamīl makes no reference to other objects of desire. The narrative depicts Jamīl's father imploring the poet to forget Buthaynah (especially since she has been married to another man). His father explicitly states that women are always available but Jamīl counters with: "By God, were I able to efface her memory from my heart and to erase her image from my mind's eye, I would have, but there is no way to that . . . indeed this is a trial and affliction."⁴⁹ The very titles, by which these stories are historically consecrated, are formed through a monogamous pairing of the beloved's name with that of the lover. The title *Majnūn Laylā*

is a grammatical construct in which Majnūn is a possessive construct of Laylā (that is, *Majnūn of Laylā*).

Yet this slip indicates that even after having met his ideal beloved, the poet is fantasizing about other objects of desire. An example of his speech that suggests there were women he was enamored of before he met her is the following verse: My love for her has eclipsed the love for others before her, and taken a place which nothing before had taken. (46) The romance does reveal that Majnūn was quite the “ladies’ man” and very fond of women’s company and converse.

Exactly what does the phrase “after her” (*ba’daha*) mean? This reference to the existence of other love objects after his romance with Laylā, is most incongruous. In the romance, there is no post-Laylā phase. Majnūn is disclosing that there may be others, not during his affair with Laylā but after the end of this affair; yet in the romance, the end of the poet’s affair is coterminous with the end of his life. Majnūn’s reference to “each one after her” (*wa’an kulli ahadin ba’daha*), can be interpreted as an indication of how it is upon an unrequited love, a fantasy beloved, that his desire is founded. Though the beloved’s image in this fantasy may change, it remains just that – a fantasy or an absent love object. Indeed, the object must be absent – it must not yield a presence or hold a promise of fulfillment – for desire to fixate upon it. Majnūn portrays himself as unable to divert his desire to the women in the group only because they offer a hope of requital and satisfaction in the love affair. His “true love” is a love that privileges the deferral rather than the consummation of union. Ultimately, it is with the phantom or fantasy of his own desire that he is in love. Hence, in the romance, tragedy also consists of Majnūn’s fixation on the unrequitedness of love, a fixation that prevents him from living “harmoniously and with ease.”

In fact, all the ‘Uḏhrī romances are about this endless deferral of desire’s fulfillment. True love or desire in these romances is defined as that which ought not to be consummated. In the ‘Uḏhrī romance of *Jamīl Buthayna*, Jamīl, at one point, asks his beloved if she would “compensate him” by doing “as men and women do for the quenching of love’s thirst?” She rejects the offer, saying “true love is spoiled when one has sexual intercourse.”⁵⁰ Union is ultimately not sought because it means the end of desire and pleasure. Desire is regarded as a pleasurable disease, and those experiencing it do not want it to end. The Andalusī theologian, Ibn Ḥazm, in his famous eleventh-century love treatise, *The Ring of the Dove*, observes: “Love is a delightful malady, a most desirable sickness. Whoever is free of it likes not to be immune, and whoever is struck down by it yearns not to recover.”⁵¹

Ostensibly, the ‘Uḏhrī poet-lovers frame themselves as seeking fulfillment and marriage with the beloved, but then they thwart their chances to achieve these goals and portray themselves the victims of fate, social mores or the beloved’s caprice. Generally, it is the beloved who is the cause of all woes.

But only ostensibly does Majnūn seek satisfaction of his desire for Laylā. Actually, he deliberately distances any possibility of fulfillment. Patricia Parker’s definition of the romance genre strongly resonates with the romance narratives as ascribed to ‘Uḏhrī poets such as Majnūn: given that “the attainment of an end

[or union with beloved] is problematic, or impossible, the focus may be less on arrival or completion than on the strategy of delay.”⁵² As a strategy of deferral, whatever obstacles or calamities that come in the way of love’s fulfillment are welcomed by the poet-lover.

There is no good in a love that does not have a calamity in it [a calamity] such as one in which its experiencer is in the throes of death.

(29)

We see how Majnūn deems being in passion’s “throes of death” a sign of the *plaisir de l’amour*. It is this very “death experience” that makes love good or pleasurable. Distance from the beloved causes despair but proximity to the ideal of nonattainment enlivens desire.

Distance does not console the self
and she [the self] does not deviate from what she does not attain.

(*Dīwān*)⁵³

In the following verse too, we see how desire’s satisfaction is only to be deferred, so as to prolong the emotion. *I part from you, missing you and I visit you, fearful*, (48) recites Majnūn. The reference to parting comes before visiting (an example of *taqdīm wa-ta’khīr*, hysteron proteron), perhaps because desire has to flow before it can ebb and it is through parting (distance) that desire intensifies and through proximity (visit) that it wanes. The tension between presence and absence of the beloved in this verse mirrors the fluctuations in the level of desire experienced by the lover. Visiting the beloved, Majnūn is faced with the potentiality of some degree of desire’s fulfillment. This is problematic and therefore, mitigates the desire. Departing from the beloved heightens his desire as a consequence of her impending absence or the remoteness of desire’s fulfillment.

However, as noted earlier, romance’s deferral of arrival at a destination is a spatial metaphor for the errors of desire and language. The error of desire, its postponement of fulfillment, is fundamentally an error of language. If true love is defined as a lack of consummation, then true love or desire is articulated through the vertiginousness of signifiers in language. It is the prolonging of desire through a wandering from one female icon to another (in other words, desire’s endless projection upon and transference from one image to another). The male wanderer’s fixation is perpetuated through the roaming of his desire from one trope to another. The wandering of Majnūn, or his *huyām*, is fundamentally a wandering of the signifier in language, precisely the aspect of language condemned by the prophet. Hence, the *huyām* or desire of Majnūn – Majnūn as a discursively constituted subject – is the literariness of language, its wandering tropes and signifiers. The instability inherent in language and desire has as its counterpart, spatial instability. Majnūn’s locomotion in the romance takes the form of not stopping but moving from site to site, endlessly roaming. Within both the linguistic and spatial realms of the courtship ritual there is never a stable geographic and semantic site.

This wandering of desire or deferral of union is precisely what constitutes the pleasure of the lover. For the male lover, fulfillment of desire is equated with the end of pleasure for one very important reason. Fulfillment of desire would mean the end of his ability to luxuriate in the eloquence of language in the courtship ritual – whether the language be his own or that of/about the beloved. Certainly, the lover’s literary prowess constitutes his desire so that desire’s attainment would result in an end to the pleasure of his discursive identity and performance. Hence, a deferral rather than an achievement of union is sought.

Errancy of the romance genre

On the level of genre, this *huyām*, that is, an endless quest or wandering, serves as a metaphor for the definition of romance itself. According to again Patricia Parker, “‘romance’ is characterized primarily as a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective or object.”⁵⁴ The literary critic Northrop Frye describes this questing as “the endless adventures and endless sexual stimulation of the wandering of desire” in romance.⁵⁵ Thus, the romance narrative’s postponement of the quest’s realization is also a postponement of desire’s consummation. Majnūn’s postponement of desire’s consummation, in other words, his prolonging of desire, becomes the prolonging of the romance narrative.

Importantly, “unchastity” becomes a narrative imperative in these romances. In other words, since the ‘Uḍhrī romance narrative depends on union’s deferral, chastity becomes in it a narrative strategy.⁵⁶ Continuation of a state of chastity and of romance narrative become one and the same thing. The achievement of desire, that is sexual union, would be the downfall of romance. If marriage or consummation is the narrative conclusion of comic romance, in the ‘Uḍhrī tragic romance, the conclusion is the lover’s death, not his union. True love, defined as lack of sexual union, is a fatal love. Narrative closure in all the ‘Uḍhrī stories consists of the death of the lover. Death, rather than a happy union of the lovers, marks completion in these romances’ narratives.⁵⁷

Majnūn’s chastity or more accurately, unchastity becomes the celebration of pleasure. A number of his verses espouse a love for the profane idea of *lahw*, meaning both “amusement, fun” and “woman” An example of Majnūn’s verses reflecting his love of *lahw* is the following:

I recalled Laylā and the bygone years
when people who said do not pursue pleasure [*lahw*] did not get any
help from me or I did not assist against amusement [*lahw*] to one who
approved thereof.

(34)

The celebration of woman as pleasure or *lahw* is a metaphor for the pleasure of speech (*lahw al-Ḥadīth*). In one of the Qur’ānic verses (31:5), this enjoyment of tropological or untrue language, this *lahw al-Ḥadīth*, is identified as a source

of moral corruption. More generally, the Qur'ān contains many verses that warn believing Muslims from pursuing *lahw* in any and all of its meanings:

What is life on earth save play and amusement [*lahw*], the Hereafter is goodness for those who are pious . . .⁵⁸

Precisely because it is the celebration of pleasure, the deferral of desire's consummation in these romances is troubling to orthodox Islamic Ḥanbalī-based theologians and critics. For these theologians during the 'Abbāsid period, the 'Uḍhrī romance's code of privileging *'Ishq* over *waṣl*, desire over legitimate union, was morally and socially deviant.⁵⁹ The privileging of desire over its union was interpreted as a kind of *shirk* (the oft-employed word for "idolatry" in especially Muslim pre-modern theological, legal and other discourses) or as a privileging of profane love over Divine love.⁶⁰ This subtext of the romance depicts Majnūn's wandering of desire or 'consummation forever stuck in *potential* as a trial, as a case of being tested and lost in the wilderness of desire.⁶¹ This Muslim Ḥanbalī-based strain constructs Majnūn's wandering of desire as a religious violation. Yet there is an irony in this orthodoxy's stance because the very privileging of the quest over union may have arisen as a consequence of an Islamic impact. Lois Giffen makes the following important observation: "Paradoxically, the influence of Islam may have transmuted pagan Arab passionate love to chaste 'Uḍhrī love which then became almost a religion of love and a blasphemy to zealous Muslims."⁶²

Errancy of the romance genre's reception among 'Abbāsid audiences(s)

We note how the errancy of genre comments on the errancy of character and vice versa. As Parker notes, "the errors of romance's characters are the unavoidable result of the genre's digressive, errant nature and likewise, the errant nature of romance is the inevitable consequence of the errors of its characters."⁶³ Significantly, the errors of the genre and its characters also become those of its "audiences" – especially the 'Abbāsid avant-garde subcultures influenced by Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian elements. Thus, the error of romance was also evident in its especially 'Abbāsid-context reception, as well as in the questionable performative uses to which it was put – as we saw in the quotation in the beginning of this chapter from the *Risālat al-Qiyān* or *Epistle of the Singing Girls* by al-Jāhiz. Further proof of the postulation that, in the medieval Arabic milieu, language was regarded as engendering desire is that the romance genre specifically was blamed for its desire-producing qualities. Love (Eros-inflected) poems and stories were condemned for their privileging of desire over reason ('*aql*) and self-control (*hilm*), because this, in turn, incited the desires of its audience members. A tenth-century 'Abbāsid Baghdadi youth declaiming or listening to Majnūn's verses might feel desire in the same way the poet himself does in the romance when he hears a description of Laylā or her verses.

The courtly class (literally connected with the 'Abbāsīd court) was faulted by religious elites for the questionable performative and interactive uses of romance (as demonstrated in the example given by al-Jāhīz). The error of romance thus became a symbolic locus for the tensions between a courtly type Eros-based theology and an urban Islamic Ḥanbalī-based religious elite within the 'Abbāsīd milieu. Since the antecedents for the love exemplified in romance were partly to be found in pagan, pre-Islamic Bedouin conceptions of love, romance's appeal to the Muslim Eros-based courtly types was looked upon with suspicion and disapproval by the Ḥanbalī-based Muslim theological religious elites.⁶⁴ Orthodox Ḥanbalī-based Muslims interpreted courtly elites' fondness for the pleasure of romances as a sign of these elites' own paganism and "unbelief." Courtly patronage of a genre whose moral waywardness which might lead believing Muslims astray was not welcomed by the orthodox. According to this Muslim Ḥanbalī-based orthodoxy, the real *jihād* was the *jihād al-naḥs* or the battle against one's own passions, and certainly not the *jihād* as redefined by a Bedouin poet-lover like Jamīl, who in its view, surrendered to his passions.⁶⁵ For these religious elites, the errancy and passion of romance was potentially as subversive as that of the pagan, Bedouin and ancient Greek element in the Islamic body politic. How else to explain the corruption of the aristocracy (especially its youth influenced by the Greco-Arab and Greco-Persian fashion trends) at the hands of those performers nurtured on and trained in songs and romances, that is, the singing girls? "The cleverest of them know by heart four thousand songs and more. . . . They are all on such subjects as adultery, procuring Eros or '*Ishq* [passionate love], youthful dalliance, yearning desire and amorous passion."⁶⁶ Again, the religious elites' views of the dangers and sinfulness of Eros or '*Ishq* [passionate love] evince a hostile reactiveness to both *al-Jāhiliyya* (e.g., pre-Islamic Bedouin conceptions of love) and the impact of what may have been perceived as too much of an intrusion of ideas and values of and from the Greek ancient masters.⁶⁷

Reader reception paradox: hamartia and the symbolic ambivalence of huyām

There also is a paradox of tragedy that is present not just in the characterization of Majnūn but also in the readers' response to his plight. To digress briefly, "error" also means "a mistake; for example, in calculation, judgment, speech, writing, action," as well as "a departure from moral rectitude; a transgression, a wrong-doing." The meaning of the word "error," as "a mistake; for example, in calculation, judgment" suggests an ambivalence ("mistake" as either something excusable or culpable) which draws our attention to the possible overlap between the roles of "tragic error" in tragedy and "errancy" in romance. As something excusable, the *Majnūn Laylā* romance's itin(erant) poet-lover is guilty of *hamartia*. Tragic error is a mistake in judgment and "tragedy concerns[those] who come to grief 'not through defect of character and wickedness but through some 'missing-the-mark'"⁶⁸ Aristotle's dictum that the tragic hero "is neither a paragon of virtue and justice nor undergoes the change to misfortune through any real

badness or wickedness but because of some mistake,”⁶⁹ “combines two discordant elements: an overall goodness of character (though not a virtuous character) and proneness toward error without reconciling them; it thus suggests an element of paradox which seems essential to tragedy.”⁷⁰

As discussed elsewhere, reader reception that conceives of a work as tragic does not ally itself against or for the protagonist. Often, tragedy generates a curious mixture of sympathy and criticism from the audience, a mixture that does not slide into either complete condemnation or approbation. Yet, a Ḥanbalī-based theological component is ineluctably present in the construction of the character’s erring. With this component being strongly emphasized, “error” becomes something blamable and the interpretation or reception can no longer be according to the more Eros-based courtly response – the more vice is emphasized, the less tragic the figure. The *huyām*/errancy of Majnūn is symbolically ambivalent in the romance and invites several interpretations. He is, on the one hand, a tragically itin(erant) poet-lover and on the other hand, according to a theological Ḥanbalī-based reading, Majnūn is a sinfully itin(erant) poet-lover. The romance offers its readers two paths to follow, two readings, and “the possibility of both these readings, or the tension between them, is probably more revealing than either reading by itself.”⁷¹

Al-Iṣfahānī and narrative errancy

Patricia Parker suggests that a congruence may be found between a romance character’s mental, moral, geographic deviations, on the one hand, and the narrative “de-viations” in the romance genre, on the other hand.⁷² Parker points out how “all . . . spatial metaphors for error have their narrative counterparts – deviation, diversion, and digression.”⁷³ Majnūn’s inability to stay on a straight path, his deviations from an “elevated path,” have their counterpart in the primary narrator’s (al-Iṣfahānī) comments. In the introduction to his magnum opus, the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* or *Book of Songs*, al-Iṣfahānī justifies his methods of composition and what is striking about his methods is the importance he assigns to divagation or digression.

moving from one thing to another [love of this] is in the nature of

good spirit what one digresses to is more pleasurable than what one moves from. The anticipated is more charismatic to the heart than that which is present.⁷⁴

Probably no better example of a practitioner of the rhetorics attacked by Prophet Muhammad can be found than the very composer/compiler of the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*. Al-Iṣfahānī, in this statement, privileges the deferral. Certainly, if what one moves to is always more pleasurable than what one departs from, then one will always be moving and never arriving. He foregrounds the pleasure of anticipation. The analogies to the privileging of *‘Ishq* over *waṣl*, of desire over desire’s fulfillment, are evident.

Al-İṣfahānī's errant mode in both the composition and suggested reading of *Kitāb al-Aghānī* is most visible in one of its "songs," the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*. In his rendering of this romance, he resists any monopoly on a single narrative theme, meaning or interpretation. The multiple beginnings, story lines, and digressions that characterize the romance suspend any linear expectations. Al-İṣfahānī, in his arrangement and presentation of material, accents the ambiguities in what happened – in matters such as how the lovers met and why Majnūn went mad. Moreover, he emphasizes the discontinuities of character to undercut a univocal interpretation of the story.

This peripatetic reading is further encouraged by al-İṣfahānī through the use of a multiplicity of genres in his composition. His chivalric desire to please induces him to counsel the reader "to browse freely and wander between seriousness and jest, *āthār* and *akhbār* biography, poetry, stories, all connected with the glorious times of the Arabs, times concerning the lives of the kings of Jāhiliya and caliphs of Islam."⁷⁵ He encourages meandering between genres (for example, between poetry and prose) and notes, for example, that if he had included only poetry set to music and not gone beyond this, "it would have been rough on the spirit, boring for the heart."⁷⁶ In the romance too, he alternates between seriousness (*jidd*) and jest in countering a monopoly on any single narrative mode.

Notes

- 1 I cautiously refer to Majnūn as a "knight-errant" – cautiously because of the set of connotations that so strongly links this term to medieval European society and courtly literature. However, I would like to thank my colleague Joe Lowry for coining a play of the word "itinerant." Use of this term, itin(erant), enables me to emphasize the errancy of Majnūn's character.
- 2 Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Women, Islam and 'Abbasid Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 3.
- 3 Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Early 'Abbasid Society, 2nd-4th/5th-10thc* (London: Routledge, 1998), 164.
- 4 To what extent the treatise may be plumbed for writing social history is highly debatable, and Gordon has discussed this, but it is noteworthy that al-Jāhiz's view of the *qayān* is a highly negative one – he sees them as purveyors and conveyors of all that is morally reprehensible. He regards them as the sources of *fitna* that is, chaos and disorder in the realm of marriage and family life. No doubt, al-Jāhiz was a product of his ninth-century time in his views of women – these singing girls were "passive" and "weak" (due to their being women), but they were most of all beyond any help, change or redemption given the craft they plied according to the analysis set forth by Gordon. Matthew S. Gordon, "Yearning (*jidd*) and Disquiet: al-Jāhiz and the Singing Girls," in *Al-Jāhiz: A Muslim Humanist for Our Time*, eds. Amin Heinemen, et al. (Beirut: Orient Institut and Wurzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2009), 264–266.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 'Amr b. Bahr al-Jahiz, *The Epistle on Singing-Girls of Jāhiz*, Approaches to Arabic Literature, No. 2, trans. and ed. A. F. L. Beeston (Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1980), 33.
- 7 Lois Giffen, *The Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 14.
- 8 Again, this binary is attributable to Joseph N. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1979), 3–4.

- 9 Ibid., 36.
- 10 Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, 141.
- 11 I will be using the words *huyām* and “errancy” interchangeably because there exist striking semantic correspondences between the word groups of *hāma* and its derivations, on the one hand, and the Latin-based “errant/error,” on the other hand. Actually, the Arabic expression *hāma* (or *ha'im*) *'alā wajhihī* is translated into English as the word “errant.” Munir Ba'albakī, *Al-Mawrid: A Modern English-Arabic Dictionary* (Beirut: Dar El-Ilm Lil-Malayan, 1987). Also, see “erratum,” in *Magdi Wahba: A Dictionary of Literary Terms: English-French-Arabic* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1974). Though a topic apart from that addressed in this chapter, it is interesting to note the extent to which the concept of the “errant” in medieval European romance parallels that of *huyām* in medieval Arabic romance. In European conceptions of the genre of romance, the knight-errant was the romancer who travelled and erred in his quest, from Don Quixote's character (which parodied the ‘knight-errant’) to the knights of the round table of King Arthur.
- 12 These Arabic words are frequently translated as “love,” but I think that a more accurate English translation is “desire.”
- 13 The importance of *hāma* and its derivations employed throughout the *Majnūn Laylā* romance has gone unremarked by scholars who have examined the story.
- 14 I am indebted to Patricia Parker's discussion of “errancy” in her work titled *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 7. Andre Miquel and Percy Kemp, in their book *Majnūn et Laylā: l'amour fou*, also discuss the motif *l'errance*. They examine its connections with another important motif – the motif of *la sauvagerie* in the romance. Andre Miquel and Percy Kemp, *Majnūn et Laylā: l'Amour Fou* (Paris: Editions Sindbad, 1984).
- 15 Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 vols (Lahore: Islamic Book Centre, 1978), 325. s.v., “*ḥubb*.” *Tayyama* means “to be enslaved in love” as well as “to be lost or astray.”
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 “errant, adj. (and n.).” OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press. www.oed-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/64100?result=1&rskey=PRmA7z& (accessed May 14, 2019). The latter meaning, “a wandering of the feelings,” appears to be no longer used, as the last example cited of its usage is in 1460.
- 18 See how the etymology of the word *lugha* (language) foregrounds meanings such as “nonsense, mistake, slips of language, erroneous speech.” Furthermore, speech is associated with acts of pain: *kalāma* “to wound”/*qaṣṣa* “to cut”/ *haka*, “to backbite”/*sarada* “to pierce, perforate.” Language is associated with both pain and pleasure. Also note the paradox of this in a culture that highly valorized its linguistic output.
- 19 The only other Qur'anic use is *hīm* which al-Daylamī in his treatise says is related to *huyām*: “*huyām* . . . is a disease afflicting camels in which they can never get enough to drink and finally die of thirst.” Pg. 36 “Cf Koran 56:55, in which those who err and deny the revealed message are promised a punishment in which they will lap up boiling water as though they were “thirsty camels (*al-hīm*).” Footnote 50, pg. 36 in al-Daylamī's, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, trans. Joseph Norment Bell and Hassan Mahmood Abdul Latif Al Shafie (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2005).
- 20 Qur'ān, 26: 224–226.
- 21 My use of words connoting abundance and plentifulness in discussing language is not inappropriate because Arab critics like Ibn Qutayba themselves describe language in terms of a corporeal vocabulary; he uses words such as “fat” and “lean.” In *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*. Ibn Qutayba uses the words *samīn* and *ghaththa*, the latter meaning “lean language” and “bad speech.” Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al Qur'ān*, commentator Al-Sayyid Ahmad Saqr (Cairo: Dār Ihyā'i al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, n.d.), 11.
- 22 See also the Qur'anic verse (31: 6) regarding how the pleasure of speech (*lahw al-Ḥadīth*) can lead one morally astray.

- 23 Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 3051.
- 24 *Lisān al-ʿArab*: “Some say it [valley] is the valley of the desert in which the lover or the poet finds himself alone. It is also said that it is the valley of speech [*wādī al-kalām*].” Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār Sādir/Dār Bayrūt, 1956), 8810. Ibn Qutaybah, too, uses this same word in a linguistic sense. Ibn Qutaybah, *Taʿwīl*, 10.
- 25 Abū Jaʿfar Muhammad b. Jarir al-Ṭabarī, *Majmaʿ al-Bavān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Syria: Matbaʿat al-ʿIrfān, 1983), 4: 207–208.
- 26 “A clearer notion of [Ibn Qutayba’s] . . . concept of *majāz* is provided by the list of subcategories . . . they include: *istiʿāra* (metaphor plus metonymy), *tamthīl* (analogy), *qalb* (inversion), *taqāim wa-taʾkhīr* (hysteron proteron), *hadhf* (ellipsis), *takrār* (repetition) . . .” W. Heinrichs, “On the Genesis of the *Haqīqa* – *Majāz* Dichotomy,” *Studia Islamica* 59 (1984): 130.
- 27 Qurʾān, 2: 226. In other words, poets should mean what they say and say what they mean.
- 28 Heinrichs, “On the Genesis,” 137.
- 29 Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), preface xi.
- 30 See also Vincent Cantarino, *Arab Poetics in the Golden Age* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 27–41. G. Van Gelder, *The Bad and the Ugly: Attitudes Toward Invective Poetry (Hijāʾ) in Classical Arabic Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 33–34. and K. Abū Deeb, “Literary Criticism,” in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, ʿAbbāsīd Belles-Lettres*, eds. Julia Ashtiany, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 339–379.
- 31 Toril Moi, “Desire in Language: Andreas Capellanus and the Controversy of Courtly Love,” in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology & History*, ed. David Aers (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), 21. Moi makes these comments in reference to A. Capellanus’s treatment of language and women in his famous love treatise but they are very relevant to the treatment of language and poets here.
- 32 Rina Drory, “The ʿAbbāsīd Construction of the Jahaliyya: Cultural Authority in the Making,” *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 36.
- 33 El Cheikh, *Women, Islam and ʿAbbasid Identity*, 2.
- 34 al-Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, 36. Also, consult footnote 50, p. 36.
- 35 Bell, *Love Theory*, 27.
- 36 Ibn Dāwūd al-Zāhirī, Abū Bakr Muhammad, *Kitāb al-Zahrā*, Vol. 1, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmūrāʾī (Jordan: Maktab al-Minār, 1985), 56.
- 37 See eleventh-century Ibn Ḥazm for the very definition of “love” as a “conjunction” between “scattered, roaming, errant souls.” Ibn Ḥazm, *The Ring of the Dove: A Treatise on the Art and Practice of Arab Love*, trans. A.J. Arberry (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1953). Also, see M. Dols for further information in M. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 4–6.
- 38 Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 4.
- 39 Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 61.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 The word *zūr*, derived from this root, means “to bear false witness or to lie.” In the following Qurʾānic verse the words *zūr* and *laghwu* (idle word, slip of language) are made symbolically and syntactically parallel:

And those who bear not false witness [*zūr*], and
 when they pass by idle talk [*bil-laghwi*], they pass with dignity.
 (25:72)

The term “idle talk” (*laghwu*) here has been interpreted as a reference to poetry, a connection that is further supported by the previously discussed exegesis of the famous Qurʾānic verse regarding poets.

- 42 See Ibn Ḥazm's quotation in previous chapter, in which revelation is defined as *zuhūran fīl-harakāt wal-'ayn*; in other words, locomotion of body and eyes metaphorizes revelation. Ibn Ḥazm, *Tauq al-Hamāma*, ed. al-Tāhir Ahmad Makkī (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1975), 60.
- 43 The other two romances are *Jamīl Buthayna* and *Qays Lubnā*.
- 44 Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, 118–119.
- 45 For example, Qur'ān, 6: 119.
- 46 Stetkevych, *Mute*, 87.
- 47 Ibid., 23.
- 48 The brigand-poet, I would argue, is in certain ways an ancestor of the 'Uḏhrī lover-poet. The dialectical nature of the links between *Ṣa'alik* poetry and the traditional pre-Islamic ode that Stetkevych identifies, mirrors the relationship of the later 'Uḏhrī love poetry/romances to this ode. Ibid., 157.
- 49 *Jamīl Buthayna* in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 8: 129–130.
- 50 Stetkevych, *Mute*, 105.
- 51 Ibn Ḥazm, *The Ring*, 31.
- 52 Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 5.
- 53 Abū Bakr al-Wālibī, *Dīwān Majnūn Laylā*, Second Edition, ed. 'A. al-Sa'īdī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, n.d.), 56.
- 54 Ibid., 4.
- 55 In a discussion of the genre, Frye quotes the following line from Ecclesiastes: "Better is the sight of the eye than the wandering of desire." What is being condemned in this line is an insatiability of appetite, a state wherein being desirous or desiring is prolonged endlessly. N. Frye, *The Secular Scripture, a Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 30.
- 56 I would like to thank Peter Parolin for this important observation.
- 57 Of course, the 'Uḏhrī lovers are famous as "those who are slain in love." In the *'Uyūn al-Akhhār*, we find the following quote: It was said to a Bedouin: "From whence are you? He said: from a people, that when they love, they die," [*aḥabbū, mātū*], 131, *Kitāb al-Nisa*.'
- 58 Qur'ān, 6: 32.
- 59 Giffen, *Love Poetry*, 129.
- 60 As A. J. Arberry, in the preface to his translation of *The Ring of the Dove*, notes: "The idealization of a sort of Platonic love in which the lover never achieved union with the beloved, inspired much of the finest poetry of Arabs." Ibn Ḥazm, *Ring of the Dove*, 12.
- 61 Romance also "is that mode or tendency which remains on the threshold before the promised end, still in the wilderness of wandering, 'error,' or 'trial.'" Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 4.
- 62 Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, 120 (see footnote no. 7).
- 63 Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 28.
- 64 Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, 117–132.
- 65 Bell, *Love Theory*, 17–18.
- 66 "The training of singing-girls," 'Amr b. Bahr al-Jāhiz, *The Life and Works of Jāhiz: Translation of Selected Texts*, trans. Charles Pellat, trans. from French by D. M. Hawke (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 267.
- 67 Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 169.
- 68 "They [insights] can also be used to increase our understanding of tragic hamartia, or missing-the-mark . . . Tragedy concerns good people who come to grief 'not through defect of character and wickedness, but through some hamartia.' Hamartia and hamartema are sharply distinguished from flaw or defect of character, both here and elsewhere." Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986), 382.
- 69 Aristotle *Poetics*, trans. Gerald F. Else (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), 38.

70 *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics*, s.v. “Hamartia,” 889.

71 Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 17.

72 *Ibid.*, 6.

73 *Ibid.*, 25.

74 *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 1: 4.

75 *Ibid.*, 1: 1–2.

76 *Ibid.*

7 ‘Abbāsid culturally primitivist readings of Laylā as object and subject

How does one optimally read “Laylā” in the tenth-century *Aghānī* version of *Majnūn Laylā*? A love story featuring mainly men, narrated, transmitted and produced by men, and performed in its poetry and song for ‘Abbāsid male audiences raises the following complex question: what does “Laylā” signify in such a love story? At the outset, there is the assumption that what is relevant is “the normative gender system that existed in the minds of the educated urban [‘Abbāsid] male elites.”¹ As El Cheikh observes, “reading women in male-authored texts” requires special attention to the “problematic of referentiality.”² She points out that

the intention of the male elite who wrote about women was not to refer to women (qua women) but rather to write to and about men and to depict relationships to traditions of male textual activity and male social and political privilege. Analyzing these writings about women becomes, thus, methodologically complex, since definitions of “woman” mostly reflect back and redefine the definitions of “men.”³

One factor that complicates the exercise of “reading women in male-authored texts” is that the narrative of *Majnūn Laylā* mandates its own genre imperatives – in other words, the story operates with its own internal system of signifiers, some of which are more a function of the relevant literary conventions than of gender constraints.

Moreover, how does one read “Laylā” in *Majnūn Laylā* in conjunction with the literary construct of the “romanticized/exoticized Bedouin” – that literary creation of the ‘Abbāsid urban period? Which processes germane to “cultural primitivism” are employed to depict “Laylā,” for instance, as a romanticized female Bedouin (when the Bedouin cosmos had suddenly become an object of entertainment and fascination)? Analyzing the “culturally primitivist” objectifications of “Laylā” in this story is much more about masculine or male-based constructions and representations than anything concerning “women (qua women).” For instance, the male poets, male singers and singing girls (who sang the poetry) ultimately invited their primarily male ‘Abbāsid audiences in various urban centers to vicariously enjoy Bedouin-style poetic tableaux of feminine seduction, eroticism, wildness, and exotification as exemplified in the tenth-century *Aghānī* version of the

Majnūn Laylā romance. "The 'Abbāsīd slave singers were well known for their beauty and sex appeal, and . . . their reputation as entrancingly beautiful women was widely acknowledged in Arabic literature of the period."⁴ "In the 'Abbāsīd period, two prominent figures dominated the musical scene: Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi (d. 838) and Ishaq al-Mawsili (d. 839). . . . Both men trained many qīyan and studying under . . . [these two court musicians and singers] was widely considered a great honor."⁵ In this regard, the stocktaking of Layla offers additional perspectives on primitivist constructions of masculinities in the 'Abbāsīd context.

Lastly, Laylā may be read as not just as a passive construct of a normative 'Abbāsīd male gender system within the romance, but also as a female agent and actor within this system of signifiers – a female user of symbols and subject in her own right. Eve K. Sedgwick asserts that "women's status is characterized by the particular ambiguity of being at the same time objects of symbolic exchange and also, at least potentially, users of symbols and subjects in themselves."⁶ Sedgwick's assertions can be employed to argue that, even as it is implicated in and through these literary texts, gender normativity is complex in the way that it is represented and operates. Also – granted that definitions of "woman" in the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* mostly reflect back upon and adjust the constructs of "masculinity" – the fact remains that the 'Abbāsīd men in question (i.e., the scriptors, transmitters, elite male audiences) dwell within social contexts at least peopled by women. This further complicates the exercise of "reading women in male-authored texts."⁷ Thus, in this chapter, I also explore "Laylā" as a female agent and actor, examining her as a female user of symbols and subject in her own right within the story of *Majnūn Laylā*. The overall goal of this chapter is to examine a range of representations of "Laylā" with the aim of unpacking and deconstructing the diverse and complex significations at hand. This is especially critical given the classical and modern readings of *Majnūn Laylā* which routinely exclude and de-emphasize the representations and subjectivities of "Laylā."⁸

Culturally primitivist representations of Layla

Laylā as beloved and temptress

Laylā is first and foremost an 'Abbāsīd male construct of the idealized beloved. The poetic idealization of the female by the male lover, Majnūn, in *Majnūn Laylā* verges on deification. Woman, enthroned on a pedestal, acquires supreme value for a man such that she can bestow life or kill. Woman is personified as Love, and Love kills. Verbal derivatives from the Arabic root *q-t-l* meaning "to kill, murder or slay" are conjoined with the vocabulary of love (*ḥubb* and *ishq*) a number of times in the chapter. Love is personified, it does the killing: "al-Majnūn, the one who Eros/Passionate Love killed" ("*al-Majnūn alladhī qatalahu al-'Ishq*," p. 2) or al-Majnūn is referred to as "the one love slew" ("*alladhī qatalahu al-Ḥubb*," p. 41). If she can kill, she can also bestow life. The earlier mention of "poetic idealization of the female by Majnūn" verging on deification is important because

such a construct of woman as the one who takes and gives life is inseparable from the idea of God who creates and causes to die. It is one of the key dimensions found in the tenth-century *Majnūn Laylā* romance that places the love story on a pathway toward mystical love.

The male desire for Laylā becomes a kind of self-effacement, a flight from corporeality. As Frye suggests, "the women in the passion-tragedies have all the . . . characteristics of someone whom it is death to love."⁹ One finds a great deal of symbolism in Majnūn's poetry depicting Laylā as the killer and slayer in the romance:

[Alas] you left me to die . . . then I do die
There is no survival for frightened souls.
(p. 44)

I yearned for Laylā to return but
all that yearnings and desires do is cut men's heads off.
(p. 34)

The memory of her has worn away the flesh and then my bones,
like a chisel which carves a piece of wood to make an arrow.
(p. 67)

A friend she is to us save that she believes that
my love has made it lawful for her to slay me.
(p. 86)

The symbolism is intense and violent: she decapitates in and through male longings for her love, which remain unrequited, and remembering or longing for her is akin to starving oneself. Also, in addition to the rhetoric of slaying (i.e., of being slain by her love), seeking her love possibly entails a physical death (the sultan rendering Majnūn's blood "legal" means that he can be lawfully killed by her kin). The beloved's friendship comes with a knife's edge. Laylā is a beloved whom it is death to love. But the more she "kills, the more the male lover desires her and the more noble a lover he considers himself."¹⁰

Even as the beloved can kill, so can she give life and cure. Love is a malady no doubt but the doctor is ultimately the beloved:

O Heart that has been worn out by passion
[A Heart] born of and from Layla, whose amulets are unbroken
Rise – the Lovers [*'Ashiqūn*] have recovered
It is high time you meet the doctor you blame
(p. 6)

The use of such medical-type metaphors cannot be separated from the infusion of Galenic precepts and practices regarding medicine with which the Islamic milieu was saturated, much of which likely gained momentum during the transition from

the Umayyad period to the 'Abbāsīd era. Galen's medical writings were first translated into Syriac (and then Arabic) during the Umayyad caliphate:

Following the lead of the philosophical school of Alexandria, where he had been educated, Sergius [a Syrian Christian in Damascus] . . . was interested not only in logic but also in cosmology and medicine. Sergius also translated extensively the medical writings by Galen (d. after 210 CE), as Ḥunayn b. Ishāq (d. 260/873) writes in his account of his own translations of Galen.

During the 'Abbāsīd period, amid a circle of prominent translators who spearheaded the trajectories for medicine, science, and philosophy – there arose the name of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq,¹¹ whose writings further provide evidence that Galen had already been heavily integrated into the Islamic intellectual universe by that time period. Ḥunayn b. Ishāq, a Christian, sent a letter in which he observed that “all the books of Galen that, as far as he knew, had been translated and some that had not been translated,” as well as all “the attempts at systematizing Galen's doctrines fueled medical science . . . both in the form of structured treatises covering the entire field and in that of monographs devoted to such sub-disciplines as ophthalmology and surgery.”¹² No doubt that the Greek systems of knowledge in the Muslim world embracing Aristotle, Galen, and Ptolemy continued well into the Būyid age and after. The full-blown maturation, in Arabic love literature, of a cluster of interrelated medical literary motifs (e.g., love as malady; bodily humors and passion/affects; beloved as both cause and cure of the lover's illness; and so forth) would have occurred precisely in and during the tenth-century Būyid age (coterminous with the tenth-century record of *Majnūn Laylā* in the Arabic-language compendium titled *Kitāb al-Aghānī* or *Book of Songs*).

'Abbāsīd temptress, seductress and poetess

As a beloved who wounds and slays, an interrelated face of Laylā is as a temptress of 'Abbāsīd men. She is the Bedouin “Kim Kardashian” of her 'Abbāsīd age and she knows how to maximize artifice as a flirt and coquette. This face is evident in a set of verses frequently attributed to Laylā, verses which underscore the dichotomy of public versus private, and its relationship to the expression of intimacy. These “verses of Laylā” are linked with a narrative that involves Majnūn visiting her in the early stages of their relationship. During this visit, Laylā engages him in conversation, but at some point, she is shown as suddenly and urgently wanting to know whether he feels for her what she feels for him. Thus, according to the narrative, she begins to ignore him and converse with others “hour after hour,” and when a young man from the neighborhood approaches the scene, “she invite[s] him [near to her] and whisper[s] to him a long secret” (p. 13–14). Meanwhile, at that moment, “there was in his heart love for her like that of hers for him and she desired him and he found her beautiful” – a sign of the mutuality of their feelings. But after whispering “a long secret” to the young man from the neighborhood, she turns to Majnūn and gazes at his face: “his color changed due to anxiety and hurt and her action pained him.” Upon witnessing this reaction, she recites a couplet.

Both in her verses and in her conduct (as depicted in the narrative), Laylā underscores the distinction that ought (according to her) to be publicly maintained by them: the distinction between what they feel and what they reveal. They must appear hostile even while inwardly desiring one another.

As flirt and temptress, Laylā, is depicted as inciting Majnūn's jealousy by rendering herself a site for 'Abbāsīd male desires other than those of Majnūn. After witnessing these feelings of jealousy and pain wrought on his face due to her action, she hastens to console him by declaring, among other things, that she actually loves him more than he loves her. Frye's observation that love of woman in passion-tragedies is emasculating because "she is a snare to men and destroys their masculinity"¹³ is applicable to contexts such as this one, in which Majnūn's desire for Laylā is rivaled and undermined by that of another man. He appears emasculated because Laylā deliberately shows that the other male eclipses his attention, and thereby provokes his jealousy by flirting with this rival male. Not surprisingly, it is in contexts like this one and the previously discussed love triangles involving competing Majnūns that his agitation takes the form of swoons, tearful bouts, and loss of reason. Laylā and other women (she is described as being with a group of women headed by a woman named Karīma), to the extent that they are represented in a love story created and consumed in an "Abbāsīd male scriptors" universe, are also shown as being easily tempted (in addition to being temptresses) and inclined toward flirting with different men, Karīma recounts. Moreover, through the content of the verses she declaims, the gendering of secrecy and revelation is underscored: male poets are linked with revelation, and women with concealment. It is Laylā who is constructed as upholding the "feminine" traits (fashioned by male notions of femininity) of discretion and secrecy in love.

In another set of verses, Majnūn, in a couplet, describes Laylā as one who teasingly keeps postponing the payment of a "debt" to him:

One [who] postpones payment of my debt,
he neither keeps the cash far away from my right to it,
thereby denying that it is there
nor does he tell me he is going to pay me.

(p. 28)

Majnūn's verses here point to the paradox of an endless deferral of desire's contentment as viewed in and through an 'Abbāsīd subtext: Laylā as temptress and seductress neither satisfies his desire nor denies his right to gain such a satisfaction. The allusion of how Laylā needs to "compensate him" resonates with another narrative, in which a group of women, employ the language of commerce in offering Majnūn sexual "compensation." Aspects of the 'Abbāsīd elite male audiences' connections with the subculture of the singing-girl or *qiyān* – a subculture in which sexual favors were demanded and given – is discernable through these verses and their associated narrative contexts. Especially in the 'Abbāsīd-period, these singing-girls "in Baghdad and its environs . . . [were] educated at establishments set up to train them in the art of becoming qiyān. Singing girls

owned by nobles, as opposed to those owned by caliphs, were hired out as performers and sometimes as prostitutes.”¹⁴

Laylā's unveiling as Bedouin poetic striptease for 'Abbāsīd male audiences

There is an intermixing of Majnūn's *tashbīb* (the serenading or rhapsodizing of the beloved) with the subgenre of *wasf* that causes it to function as a kind of male poetic strip-tease. The latter constitutes an ancient Arabic subgenre of poetry which involved an emphasis upon “flattering description . . . [or] the embellishment of reality.”¹⁵ Majnūn's poetry about Laylā is set to music and song in order to ultimately enhance the pleasure of the elite 'Abbāsīd male audiences. Selections from the 'Abbāsīd-era romance of *Majnūn Laylā* and from the *ghazal* genre – love poems¹⁶ – of male poets such as 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a and Majnūn are characterized by motifs of the revelation or “coming out” of a young woman as the beloved. It is possible that such motifs functioned as an eroticized public unveiling for consumption by 'Abbāsīd male audiences at courtly song and dance performances. To titillate these male audiences further, this “coming out” is rendered as a quintessentially and exotically Bedouin female phenomenon, something about which these women gossiped and in which they exulted. It is worth noting that these two anecdotes support the interconnections between *wasf* (embellished description) and *tashbīb* (eulogy, serenade) as also discussed later in this chapter:

While brushing her teeth with a toothstick [*miswāk*], Laylā came upon a female neighbor [*jāra*] of hers from 'Uqayl. Drawing a deep breath she said: May Allah send rain to the one who presented me this toothstick. Her female companion inquired: Who is he? She said: Qays ibn al-Mulawwah. Then she wept while she removed her dress to bathe and asked: Woe into him. He laid at my doorstep what ruined him without my deserving that. I implore you, by God, did he tell the truth or lie in his description of me? She [neighbor] said: Indeed, he told the truth. Her saying reached Majnūn and he wept and then recited:

Though we thought her to be niggardly, we were told that she
said, “May the rain-cloud abundantly water the ruined abode.
Glad tidings to the rider with whom we used to be courteous,
that offered to us a twig from arāk wood.”

She said to her female neighbor: “In God's name answer truly, did Majnūn's
description tell the truth or lie?”

(pp. 61–62)

What is striking about this scene is that Laylā poses the question: “[D]id he tell the truth or lie in his description of me?” to her friend when she has disrobed and is nude. We have a portrait of two women, one woman undressing in front of another woman friend, and inviting the gaze of the latter at her naked body. The female gaze is being solicited ostensibly to allow Laylā's woman friend to judge whether her male lover has flatteringly portrayed her – but ultimately the gaze is entirely male and 'Abbāsīd male at that: it is a male-produced poem set to song in which

other male audiences vicariously “see” Laylā. On the one hand, Laylā is shown being very absorbed with whether or not Majnūn’s words, his poetic commercial, have advertised her physical beauty and yet, on the other hand, she is depicted complaining about how Majnūn’s indiscretion has besmirched her reputation. Her companion responds by affirming that indeed the poet had done her justice to her physical beauty, that he had “told the truth.”

It is noteworthy that ‘Abbāsīd-inflected constructions of both the so-called Umayyad ‘Umarī *ghazal* (of which the most famous practitioner was the Hijāzī poet ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī’a) and the Umayyad ‘Uḍhrī *ghazal* (of which the most famous practitioner was Majnūn) contain such motifs of the “revelation or coming out” of a young woman or beloved,¹⁷ underscoring the fluidity of such sub-genres. Hence, in one of ‘Umar’s poems about his lady love Hind, he also depicts her musing aloud with her female friends about whether or not he has beguilingly portrayed her in his description or *wasf*:

They claimed that she asked our female neighbors, when she
stripped herself one day to bathe,
“Do you see me to be as he describes me – in God’s name
answer truly – or is he not moderate?”
Then they laughed, saying to her, “Fair in every eye is the
one you [O Eye] desire!”¹⁸

There are many erotic messages for elite male ‘Abbāsīd audiences embedded in the bath scenes. In both scenes, the beloved strips before her female friends and asks them to gaze at her body and compare the way they see her body to how the poet has described her in his poetry. Even the somewhat homoerotic female element present in this interaction between the beloved and her women friends is designed to ultimately enhance male pleasure. For example, in ‘Umar’s verses, Hind’s friends are shown laughing and taking pleasure in her exhibition of her nudity. Moreover, the allusion to the “fair one” in the cryptic comment, “Fair in every eye is the one you desire!” refers to the “Eye” itself (i.e. fair is the object of desire of the Eye’s gaze) – the eye’s gaze ultimately consisting primarily the gaze of male eyes.¹⁹

Also, the explicit links between the disrobing of the beloveds and the questions they pose suggest that physical description of the female body was prominent in the *wasf* of ‘Abbāsīd male poets. In effect, each beloved is shown pleasurably absorbed in and musing with her friends over the matter of whether the poet-lover has described her physical appearance in a flattering manner, whether his poetry has appealingly mirrored her. Actually, in both scenes, the beloved basks in her fame, delights in being the envy of other women, and is shown receiving the blandishments of her female friends, receiving their affirmation that she indeed has achieved a courtship coup. In ‘Umar’s verses, the playful response given by the lady love’s female companions as well as their accompanying laughter also suggest that they are aware of the multiple erotic meanings behind her inquiry.

In the context of a *qiyān* (singing girls’) culture at the ‘Abbāsīd palace performances, the “star” sex appeal of the beloved (somewhat à la mode the most

talented 'Abbāsīd qīyan or singing girls) would be greatly enhanced through the musical portrayal and broadcasting of these tantalizingly erotic bath scenes involving the beloved and her female companions in the verses of the 'Uḏhrī poets as well as in the poetry of 'Umar ibn Abī Rabi'a.²⁰ By depicting the beloved exhibiting her body to her female friends, by showing that she took pleasure in having a handsome lover who serenaded her physical beauty, these poets (and the singers who sang their poetry) ultimately invited their primarily 'Abbāsīd male audiences in various urban centers to vicariously enjoy these Bedouin-style poetic tableaux of feminine eroticism. Certainly, the implied access that the poets, Majnūn and 'Umar, are shown to possess to women's company and circles (all chances to view feminine beauty), as well as the depictions of their fondness for this company, all enhance the viewing experience. By representing the women as preoccupied with the way the lover's masculinity captures and telegraphs especially the sensuality of the beloved's body, with how he mirrors this sensuality back specifically to a community of male suitors, the poet lends both an element of the risqué and one of authenticity to his tableaux of women. Moreover, through a portrayal of the beloved receiving the accolades of her girlfriends, the poet himself compounds the tribute being paid to her. In a sense, the versification of these bath scenes and their public declamation allow for collective tribute to be paid successively to the beloved by multiple parties, multiple times – first, by the poet, then by the beloved's girlfriends and, finally, by her male suitors and the poet's male audiences.

The specter of envy (intermingled with pleasure), especially as experienced by women, seems to loom large in material related to the poet's *wasf* of the beloved. In another of Majnūn's poems concerned with descriptions of Laylā, he mentions that others are jealous of Laylā, while she herself is moderate when she talks. In 'Umar's poem too, there is a hint of envy present in the response given by Hind's female friends to her inquiry regarding her poet-lover's *wasf*. In Aḥmad Shawqī's twentieth-century Egyptian adaptation of *Majnūn Laylā* to drama, there is a scene in which Laylā's female friends enviously remark on the pride she takes in her celebrity status.

SALMA: See, Hind, how proudly she preens herself!

HIND: And why not, Salma? Is it not her fame that Majnūn hoists?

'ABLA: Then why does she deny him?

HIND: Such is the sport of woman: we, being women,

Are the more intimate with woman's ways.²¹

Coterminous with the presence of envy in scenes concerned with poetic *wasf* is the appearance of emphasis on moderation (*iqtisād*) in speech (*kalām*). As mentioned earlier, in the poem in which Majnūn mentions that others are jealous of Laylā he also relates that Laylā herself is moderate when she talks. And in 'Umar's couplet, Hind teasingly asks her friends: *Do you see me to be as he describes me – in God's name answer truly – or is he not moderate?* Yet, I would argue that 'Umar depicts Hind's character as only appearing to show concern for

moderation, when actually she desires lavishness rather than moderation in her lover's description of her.

For the same reason I would argue that, although these poets are depicted as signaling that a lack of moderation in speech should be avoided in courtship language (because it generates envy in those (over)hearing such speech), in actuality, immoderation in speech (that is, an enviable *wasf*) and the elicitation of envy are precisely what these poets are shown as making prominent in the 'Abbāsīd tableaux of women's society. Though these poets paint a portrait of women who are chaste, modest, and desirous of moderation in the courtship rituals (so as to avoid the envy of their friends and peers), male poets (and possibly other 'Abbāsīd male scriptors) undercut this portrayal through various devices to demonstrate that the beloved is scarcely desirous of a chaste *wasf* or moderation in speech, and that she revels in the envy of her female friends. As poet-heroes in their own 'Abbāsīd romances, these men deconstruct the myth of an 'Udhri virginal and modest love and courtship relation. Only *ostensibly* are poets such as Majnūn and 'Umar concerned with being moderate and not provoking envy, only *ostensibly* are they concerned with being restrained in the give-and-take of the courtship ritual. Actually, these poets are portrayed as capitalizing on broadcasting and trading provocative words about desirable women amid men who are desiring 'Abbāsīd and other male subjects.

The meaning behind the poet's versification of the intimate scene of the beloved basking in her fame, enjoying the envy of other women, may also lie in the courtship exchange between the lovers themselves. The enumeration of the various commodities being traded between the beloved and her lover in these anecdotes and the verses accompanying them shed some light on this issue. According to both the narrative and verses, Laylā relates that Majnūn presents her with a toothstick made from aromatic Arak wood. The lover's gift elicits a gesture of benevolence from the beloved, for she utters a prayer or auspicious words on his behalf. But let us examine this transaction more closely: phallic symbolism may be associated with the lover's gift (toothstick/twig), while imagery of invigoration and purification may be associated with the beloved's prayer (rain or a downpour of water on the "ruined abode," *manzilan khariban*). The symbolism of "ruin" (*ahlaka*) appears in the narrative in association with the disrepute the lover has brought upon himself and in his verses, it reappears in the form of a different word (*khariba*) describing the "abode." Also, in the narrative Laylā invokes rain to fall on "the one who presented me with this toothstick," while in the verses, the poet depicts her as praying for rain to "*water the ruined abode*." Certain syntactic and symbolic parallels are drawn between the poet with the "ruined" reputation and the "ruined abode." Assuming the regenerative significance of rain or pouring water, the image of water invigorating a "ruined abode" thus may metaphorize the beloved's pardon of the lover, or a rebirth of the "ruined, wasting lover through the ennobling powers of the beloved's love. Hence, both the lover and beloved are depicted as exchanging multiple meanings encoded in the giving and receiving of both concrete (toothstick) and abstract (words) commodities. The lover, in turn, recognizes Laylā's act of generosity in his poem by conceding that she is not

"niggardly," as he had thought. Given that niggardliness, in the courtship context, represents a refusal to participate in courtship's system of exchange, the lover is thus shown acknowledging that the beloved is still engaged in the courtship transaction with him. In return for her utterance of beneficent speech, he utters a poem. Again, words are bestowed or traded for words in the courtship ritual.

To how great an extent 'Uḏhrī male poets are shown representing women as both the objects and subjects of exchange in implied Bedouin courtship and marriage rituals is debatable, but clearly multiple systems of exchange and circulation are shown simultaneously operating within such rituals. Certain benefits are shown accruing to the beloved from her self-awareness of how she functions as an icon of desire and symbol of love.

Laylā as object of wonder and amazement through 'Abbāsīd eyes

A literary device called *ta'ajjub*²² (marveling or amazement) or the *'ajaīb* (the wondrous or amazing) is found in the love story wherein Laylā is rendered an object of "wonder and amazement." In the words of Lois Giffen, Arabic love literature exhibited a trend toward collecting "whatever one considers unusual in prose and poetry. In an effort to outdo his predecessors, and to add something to his work, the writer on love theory looks for the surprising [or wondrous – *ajīb*], extraordinary (*nādir*), and strange (*gharīb*) rather than for what was original. . . . He therefore ransacks the old books for their most rare and amazing treasures."²³ Possibly this 'Abbāsīd literary device had antecedents in the translation and appropriation of the *Alexander Romance* which began during the Umayyad period. Much before the rise of Islam, circles of erudite Syrian Christians in Damascus and its environs had become familiar with the Greek philosophy and medicine and alchemy. It was under the Umayyads that the initial appropriations of the *Alexander Romance* [in Arabic *Iskandernamah*] began.²⁴

The employment of the 'Abbāsīd Arabic rhetorical device of "*ta'djīb* ('causing amazement')"²⁵ in the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* is illustrated in and through several narrative units. It is a literary device that dovetails nicely with the function of the subgenre of *tashbīb* (serenading or eulogizing the beloved). For example:

so they [group of women] said to him [Majnūn]: What amazed [root of the aforementioned *ta'djīb* ('causing amazement')] in her? He said: Everything I saw and witnessed and heard from her amazed me. By God, I did not see anything in her except that it was pleasing in my eye and attached to my heart. I worked hard so that I would see or hear one thing that I did not like so as to turn away from her, but I did not find it.

(pp. 82–83)

Sight – seeing and beholding through the eyes (e.g., "everything I saw and witnessed," that was "pleasing in my eye") are integral to this causing of "wonder." Qualities of stylized exaggeration only enhance the effects of this device, e.g., "I

worked hard so that I would see or hear one thing that I did not like so as to turn away from her, but I did not find it.” Actually, Laylā functions both as an object of wonder *and* a site for what is known as rhetorical embellished description – i.e. the genre of *wasf*. These interlinkages between *wasf* and *ta'jjub* or “*ta'djīb* (‘causing amazement),”²⁶ are once again seen in a variant upon the aforementioned narrative. Majnūn, again, is asked by a group of women to describe Laylā (*ṣifha lanā*) within the context of a larger question: “What pleased you about or made you most amazed by her?” He responds with: “By God I did not see anything in her except that it was pleasing in my eye and attached to my heart. I worked hard so that I would see or hear one thing that I did not like so as to turn away from her, but I did not find it. They said to him: describe her to us, so he began to recite.”

And so Majnūn describes Laylā's fair complexion, dark eyes, and her face is “as if a moon suspended amid the wing of the night.”²⁷ Evidently, then, the sub-genre of *wasf* may be integrated with the rhetorical device of *ta'jjub* or “*ta'djīb* (‘causing amazement).”²⁸

Another syntactic construction with parallels to these narratives, also found in the romance, is the following in which the focus is upon the “most beloved” in place of the “most wondrous”:

It was said to Majnūn: What have you seen that was most beloved to you? He said: Laylā. They said: Forget Laylā, because we know she is not with you but with other than you. He said: By God, there was nothing that I loved, except that when Laylā was mentioned that it fell from my eye and its joy was removed from me, except that I saw a deer one time so I looked at it and remembered Laylā and it grew in beauty in my eyes.

(p. 74)

Several key elements are present here: what is common to both constructions is that each is launched by a rhetorical question featuring a grammatical comparative or superlative article: “most beloved” or “what amazed you [most]?” Likewise, the interlocutors of Majnūn constitute an implied female audience – in other words, the gender of “they” in both of the aforementioned examples constitutes a “group of women.” But El-Cheikh's assertion that “the normative gender system that existed in the minds of the educated urban male elite” is what is most relevant in “reading women” applies here. In a curious case of layered attribution, this interlocutor construction permits for an interactive dimension between at least three constituencies: the lover-poet male performer; the group of female interlocutors; and the ‘Abbāsīd educated urban male elite audiences. Basically, the female interlocutors are shown being the “expert” facilitators and authorities in posing the questions to the male poet-lover for primarily the gaze of the implied elite male audience; the former always has a ready answer for the latter. No doubt, though, that Laylā the beloved is rendered the sole site and object of both wondrous amazement and an all-consuming passionate male love.

The reference to the “deer” in the aforementioned passage (“except that I saw a deer one time so I looked at it and remembered Laylā and it grew in beauty in my eyes”) is another vital way in which Laylā is symbolically represented as “Bedouin,” “wild,” and “exotic” in this ‘Abbāsīd romance. Such symbolic links between the allure of the beauty of women and allure of the beauty of gazelles are frequently employed in the pre-Islamic ode’s love prelude, and in the ‘Uḡhrī romance of *Majnūn Laylā*, their legacies are evident in the tradition of eulogizing or *tashbīb* being carried on.

As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, Arabic love literature presents the interconnections between *wasf* and *tashbīb*. In the context of love poetry, specifically, there appears to be evidence of the interconnections between *wasf* and *tashbīb*, either in the form of an assumption of “equivalence between *wasf* and *tashbīb* [rhapsody of a beloved]²⁹ or in the intermixing of both in the love story of *Majnūn Laylā*. Indeed, as mentioned elsewhere, the performance of a *wasf* constitutes one of the three beginnings of the *Majnūn Laylā* love story: Majnūn falls in love with the description of Laylā presented to him:

Laylā was from Banī al-Ḥarīsh and she is the daughter of Mahdī bin Sa’id Ibn Mahdī Ibn Rabi’ah ibn al-Ḥarīsh, and she was the most beautiful and best of women in intellect and in manners and appearance, and Majnūn would enjoy the company of women and talking to them. So he heard of her and she was described to him [*nu’itat lahu*], so he headed to her, intending to visit her. He wore the best of clothes and used the best perfume he had, and he embarked on a camel he had and wore his sword and came to her, and he greeted her and she greeted him. He sat with her and they spoke to one another, and each one of them was impressed with the other, and they remained that way until night would come, and he went back to his people and experienced the longest night he had ever had, and he tried to close his eyes but he could not.

(pp. 44–45)

Here the auditory precedes the visual: he has “heard of her” before “she was described to him” (although it is unclear just what he had heard). Although this narrative does not actually convey the content of the *wasf* nor comment on who exactly performed this description, such poetic description of women was, of course, always performed by male poets. Upon her have been described to Majnūn, he embarks on a visit to meet with her, and this meeting is unforgettable. They meet and converse for a long while (until nightfall) and “each one of them was impressed with the other.” In the ‘Abbāsīd-era meta-discourse on love, *wasf* is described as one of the “causes” of falling in love. For instance, in his treatise on love, *The Ring of the Dove: the Practice and Art of Arab Love*, Ibn Ḥazm, the eleventh-century *Andalusi* theologian and love theorist, devotes an entire chapter to this subject, which he calls “On Falling in Love through a Description.” It is sandwiched between two other chapters on the causes of love, namely “On Falling in Love While Asleep” and “On Falling in Love at First Sight.”³⁰

Laylā's wildness as gazelle in the Majnūn Laylā romance

The 'Uḏhrī romances bear literary genealogical links to the pre-Islamic genre of the ode or *qasīda*, and it should be noted that in the pre-Islamic *qasīda*, wild animals act as a metaphor for virginal women; these wild animals are a contrast to the domesticity of the poet's own riding animal (that is, a she-camel or mare). But I maintain that metaphors of "wildness" in the tenth-century *Majnūn Laylā* romance are 'Abbāsīd examples of Bedouin-style poetic tableaux of feminine exotification. The 'Abbāsīd male poets, male singers and singing girls (who sang the poetry) invited their primarily male, urban 'Abbāsīd audiences to vicariously enjoy the way a domestic or wild animal sometimes symbolically represents the beloved or another female character in these love stories. Two types of animals in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, the ewe and gazelle, represent the character of Laylā. Several interactions in the love story demonstrate these symbolic portrayals.

When marriage to a man other than the poet-lover occurs in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, motifs of animal sacrifice suddenly are brought to the forefront in the story. Once the marriage has been consummated and the rivalry between the husband and poet-lover increases, to end this intensifying antagonism, a kind of scapegoat is chosen.³¹ Another way to put it is that in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, once the pattern of triangulation (lover, the beloved Laylā, husband) that leads to marriage runs its course, the text recreates another triangle on a symbolic level: a domestic animal, substituting as ritual victim for a virgin bride-to-be, is sacrificed.³²

In the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, again, two types of domestic animals (the ewe³³ and the she-camel) are found. The symbolic use of the ewe as a ritual victim in the romance stems from actual social practice, for among pre-Islamic Arabs, a ram or ewe was a primary animal of sacrifice. In the 'Uḏhrī group of love stories (and possibly in pre-Islamic poetry as well), a virgin (e.g., Laylā,) is the preeminent surrogate victim and a domestic animal that substitutes for her is often the ritual victim. Another animal, the gazelle, acts as a simile for the virgin or beloved Laylā in the *Majnūn Laylā* story but is not to be regarded as a ritual victim. Given that in the pre-Islamic *qasīda*, wild animals functioned as similes for virginal women, what is often stressed in these analogies with wild animals is that the women are high-born, free women who do not engage in domestic work or menial tasks.³⁴ Only domestic animals are sacrificed, whereas wild animals, such as the gazelle, are consecrated for freedom by the poetic canon. This is consistent with W. Robertson Smith's observation that "an animal . . . the Arabs would have allowed to go free instead of killing" would be, "primarily, a thing that is taboo . . . one that has supernatural qualities or associations, of a kind that forbid it to be used for common purposes."³⁵

A narrative unit from the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* signifies culturally primitivist notions of Bedouin wildness and exoticism for primarily male, urban 'Abbāsīd audiences:

Majnūn passed by two men that had hunted a gazelle. They had bound her with a rope [*fa-rabatāhā bi-habl*] and were taking her away. When Majnūn saw her

thrashing her feet in the rope, his eyes teared and he said to them: Release her and take in her place a ewe from my sheep. (And Majnūn in his narrative related:

Take in place of her a young she-camel from my camels.) So he gave the [ewe] to the two [men] and they freed [the gazelle]. She made her escape running away. Majnūn said to the two men when he saw her in their tangle of rope:

O my two companions, that today have ensnared in a rope a likeness of Laylā, and then shackled her.

Indeed, this day I see in the profile of your ewe, a similitude that resembles Laylā, so release her . . .

And he said concerning her [gazelle], gazing at her while she was running with great speed, fleeing fearfully:

O likeness of Laylā, do not fear me for I today am a friend of the female wild beast.

O likeness of Laylā, were you to tarry awhile, perhaps my heart would recover from its ravages.

She flees, having been liberated from her bond by me.

You – If only you knew – have been freed for Laylā.

(81–82)

This anecdote demonstrates that the lover, while aware that Laylā has been married to another man, symbolically enacts the liberation of his beloved gazelle. A domestic animal, a ewe, is substituted, at the behest of the poet, for the gazelle that was pursued and trapped by the party of male hunters for the purpose of slaughter and consumption.³⁶ Only the wild gazelle, or Laylā as the elusive object of desire, can be enshrined in the 'Abbāsīd poetic canon. A ewe would not make for an appealing object of male desire. The gazelle, in the narrative, is entrapped by the hunters' rope, *fa-rabatāhā bi-habl*, just as Laylā, as a ewe, is bound to Thaqīf by ropes (*hibāl*) in the afore-cited verses declaimed by the poet: "Look there at Laylā who has become like a ewe that is let, whose halters [*hibāl*] have been cut off from all except Thaqīf."

Returning to the poet's verses concerning the gazelle and ewe, he himself is shown as quite self-consciously analogizing between the gazelle's entrapment and Laylā's marriage, and metaphorically enacting Laylā's liberation from what he perceives to be marital bondage: "You," he proclaims to the gazelle, "if only you knew – have been freed for Laylā." The use of the word *withāq*, meaning not only "rope" but also "bond" in the verse "She flees, having been liberated from her bond by me," underscores the merging of a bodily bondage with a conjugal one. Suzanne Stetkevych has written about "the identity of the invigoration of hunt and battle with that of marriage – that is, licit and procreative sexuality" in pre-Islamic poetry.³⁷ The pre-Islamic poet 'Antarah captures this metaphor in his "Mu'allāqa" when he proclaims "O lovely is the hunted wild ewe [*yā shāta ma qanasin*], to whom is she lawful? To me she is unlawful; would to God that she

was not unlawful?"³⁸ The term *ḥalīla*, or "unlawful," refers to a woman he cannot marry because his tribe is at war with her tribe. For the primarily male, urban 'Abbāsīd audiences performing and viewing the *Majnūn Laylā* narrative, the symbolism of the party of male hunters who hunted and entrapped the gazelle acts as a Bedouin-style metaphor for the courtship of Laylā by Thaḳīf and his marriage to her. The hunt also metonymically recreates the lover's quest for the beloved; in the romance of *Qays Lubnā* too, "Qays accompanies some friends on a hunt expedition in the hope of seeing Lubnā."³⁹

In another similar narrative from the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*, the triangulated configuration involves the poet, a wolf and a gazelle – a wilder and more exotically Bedouin-style tableau for mainly male, urban 'Abbāsīd audiences. This second unit is as follows:

It was said to Majnūn: What have you seen that has been most endearing to you? He said: Laylā. It was said: Laylā permitting for we already know what she is to you, rather excepting her. He said: By God, nothing . . . except that I saw a gazelle once, and when I contemplated it, I recalled Laylā and [its] beauty began to increase in my eyes. Then a wolf accosted it and it fled. I followed it until it disappeared from my sight. I later discovered that the wolf had felled it [*sara 'a*] and eaten some of it. So I aimed at [the wolf] with an arrow and did not err in slaying it. I slit open its stomach and extracted what he had eaten of [the gazelle] and adding it to the remains of its corpse and I buried it. I then burned the wolf. Concerning this, I recited:

God refused to dispense kindness to the creature,
Patience regarding what He has willed for it.
I saw a gazelle grazing amid the meadow,
and said: Yonder I see Laylā glimmering in the noonday.
O gazelle, eat wholesomely and amply and have no dread,
indeed you are a neighbor [*jāra*] to me, do not fear fate.
I have for your sake strong weapons – a steely sharp sword,
[and] I make it yield the best of cuts.
It did not fear me except a wolf leapt up,
and clamped its fangs and claws in the deer's belly.
I chose an arrow from my quiver and let it
fall upon the heart of the wolf and its throat.
Killing him slackened my rage and cured my heartsickness.
Indeed, ardour attained vengeance.⁴⁰

(p. 74)

In this narrative, Laylā is pursued by a wolf and, furthermore, is caught and eaten by him. Here, what may the wolf's hunt and killing of the gazelle represent for primarily male, urban 'Abbāsīd audiences? In a modern Egyptian adaptation of this romance, the playwright A. Shawqī, has Qays (the tribal name of Majnūn), at one point, declare: "*And many a wolf that rolled its friendly tooth and claw in my hand is tenderer Laylā, than thy jealous kinfolk.*"⁴¹ An analogy is made between

a wolf and Laylā's "jealous, greedy kin," specifically the father. Likewise, in the Qur'ānic story of Joseph in Chapter 12, Sura Yūsuf, Joseph's father compares his other sons (that is, Joseph's brothers) to a ravenous wolf. The wolf in this narrative, therefore, most likely represents Laylā's male kin (especially the father) or her husband. The poet's losing sight of the gazelle (Laylā) precisely during the period the wolf catches, kills, and consumes her becomes comprehensible when we recall that Laylā's kin initially concealed from Majnūn the fact of her marriage to Ward and its consummation. The retaliatory aspect of the narrative, whereby Majnūn slays the wolf, as well as the poet's words, "*Killing him slackened my rage and cured my heartsickness*," also becomes comprehensible. By fantasizing about avenging himself upon Thaqīf for the marriage and loss of his beloved, Majnūn performs a cathartic exercise. The second narrative depicts the wolf killing and devouring the gazelle, and then, to avenge this killing, another hunter, Majnūn kills and burns the wolf. The poet himself, after killing the wolf, proclaims: "Killing him slackened my rage and cured my heartsickness; Indeed, ardour attained vengeance."

'Abbāsīd representations of Laylā's subjectivity

Laylā as consensual extra-marital lover and/or adulteress

The face of Laylā as an adulteress figure – i.e., her extra-marital liaison with Majnūn once she is married, an 'Abbāsīd depiction of her self-initiated extra-marital trysts with Majnūn in what can be termed an adulterous relation – has hardly been recognized by scholars. The next incident illustrates how the lovers meet covertly during the night. The imagery of a servant is present in the narrative, and the servant-girl helps to preserve the secrecy and privacy of an illicit adulterous relationship. That it occurs after the beloved Laylā is married is suggestive of a sexual intimacy between them.

Laylā's husband and her father departed due to a matter that took the tribe away to Mecca during the night. Then Laylā sent her slave-girl to Majnūn to extend an invitation to him. So he stayed at her place for a night and she made him leave at daybreak, saying to him: Come to me each night as long as the tribe is away. He [regularly] came to her place until they [father and husband] returned. Concerning the last night of their tryst, when she bade him farewell, he recited:

Enjoy Laylā, indeed you are an owl . . .⁴²
 that each day draws nearer to its death.
 Enjoy until the riders return, [for] when they return,
 Forbidden to you is her speech (kalāmuhā).⁴³

(p. 72)

Several elements are noteworthy: Laylā takes the initiative to invite him, she uses a messenger (her slave-girl) to convey the invitation, the main male authority

figures being deceived are the father and husband of the beloved, and the lovers meet clandestinely at night more than once. Also, the equivalence between (verbal) converse and illicit (sexual) intercourse are discernible in the following verse: "Enjoy until the riders return, [for] when they return, Forbidden to you is her speech." These verses are certainly to be included among Majnūn's risqué verses – yet, here again the poetry tantalizingly transgresses that which is private and secret through its recitation and circulation. In these verses, the lover surrenders to a desire to covertly enjoy his experiences with Laylā while he can, as long as her husband and father are away. The associations between death and the owl are clear in the poem ("Enjoy Laylā, indeed you are an owl . . . that each day draws nearer to its death"), an unsurprising metaphor, given that "an owl, representing the soul, was believed by the Arabs to depart from the head of the deceased."⁴⁴

It should be mentioned that it is the love prelude of the pre-Islamic ode that contains the antecedents for this motif of the illicit, adulterous and risky encounter between the 'Uḏhrī lovers. Imagery of the covering and veiling of women, of women in curtained tents and howdahs (women not only kept and revealed secrets but were to be kept secret), abounds in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, and I believe that this imagery partakes in the motif already identified: that of the secret encounter and meeting, even one that shades into the adulterous. In the selection from the well-known ode shown here by the famous pre-Islamic poet Imrū l-Qays, secrecy and accessibility are paradoxically associated with an egg, as something concealed and protected by a shell:

Many an "egg" of the curtained quarters,
whose tent none dares to seek,
I took my pleasure with her,
unhurried.
I stole past guards
to get to her, past clansmen
Eager, could they conceal it,
to slay me.⁴⁵

The night allows the lover access and it is the night's darkness again that ensures their secrecy and privacy as a couple. The presence of "guards" and "clansmen" symbolizes the barriers to this access; the guards are on the lookout. Certainly, the forbidden quality of the love (the "egg" is pregnant and presumably wedded to another) heightens its intensity.

In 'Abbāsīd narrations of three 'Uḏhrī romances, *Majnūn Laylā*, *Qays Lubnā* and *Jamīl Buthayna* respectively, the women themselves are not shown resisting these types of secret meetings, and in the aforementioned narrative, the beloved, Laylā, is shown inviting and arranging the tryst with her lover. The beloved in question voluntarily engages in a consensual bond with her lover. She receives her lover of her own free will, even after marriage. At times, she is shown turning down opportunities for trysts or postponing the meetings. In other words, the

women or female beloveds choose to have trysts with their lovers. They choose to arrange, keep and maintain the privacy and secrecy of these trysts. It is the fathers and husbands who seek to prevent the lovers' trysts.

Laylā as poetess thru 'Abbāsīd eyes

Eve Sedgwick's insight regarding the "particular ambiguity of [women] being at the same time objects of symbolic exchange and also, at least potentially, users of symbols and subjects" is especially evident in the portrayals of Laylā as a poetess in her own right. Laylā is depicted as using the same symbolic language used to objectify her. She is shown composing and/or reciting verses at least half a dozen times in the romance. For example, Laylā's poetry is a pivotal element in a number of 'Abbāsīd-inflected "testing and flirting" scenes (repeated throughout the love story) that Laylā enacts vis-à-vis Majnūn.⁴⁶ One of these dovetails with the second of the "three beginnings" of the love story of *Majnūn Laylā*. This initial account of this scene in the romance, accompanied by a set of Laylā's verses, is as follows (beforehand, I provide a paraphrase of the narrative context):

When Majnūn, in all his finery, is amid a bevy of maidens and is suddenly rendered angry by a rival of sorts, namely, a bedouin rustic shepherd who pops up and steals the attention of this group of women headed by one Karīma, after a bout of fury, Majnūn comes back and finds Laylā in the courtyard; she is depicted as one of the bevy of maidens not taken in by the shepherd. But the main thing is that as soon as he returns and their gazes meet, she begins to test him and flirt with him (whispering to another youth). To top this off, Laylā then gives him a pointed look (and seeing his state of shock), she recites her couplet to him:

Both of us appear in front of people
to hate each other
and yet each is entrenched with his friend.
The eyes inform us of what we [both] desire,
And in our two hearts, a latent passion pulses.

(p. 14)

A variant of these verses is found a few pages later:

Both of us appear in front of people
to hate each other
and yet each is entrenched with his friend.
The secrets of the glancer are not hidden
if the eyes disclose what he conceals.

(p. 16)

Upon hearing these verses, Majnūn faints and passes out; love for each other in both of them is depicted as existing to an excessive degree. A dialectic of

secrecy and revelation, replete with corporeal symbolism, characterizes all these sets of Laylā's verses associated with this testing, flirting, and gauging encounter. Again, Laylā's flirtatiousness, and that of the bevy of women, is evocative of the flirtatiousness of the subculture of the *qiyān*, or singing girls (plural *qayān*), of 'Abbāsīd elite male culture in Baghdad – a song culture that was rapidly fading (and under attack) when al-Iṣfahānī transmitted and compiled the *Book of Songs* or *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. As noted, variations of this testing and flirting scene are referenced throughout the love story but common to all these is this element of Laylā testing and gauging Majnūn's feelings for her. Yet another later example of this prefaced by the narrative context offers a truncated version of Laylā's verse:

He came to her one day as he used to come, and he came to speak to her but she turned away from him. She turned to someone else to speak to, with the intention of testing him and to know what was in his heart. When he witnessed that, he became excessively distressed so much so that it became apparent in his facial expressions. When she feared for him, she came to him hurriedly and said:

Both of us appear in front of people
to hate each other
and yet each is entrenched with his friend.⁴⁷

So he became happy and knew what was in her heart, so she said to him: "All I wanted was to test that what you felt about me was stronger than what I felt for you, and I give my vow to God that after this day if I were to sit with any other man, that I may taste death." Upon hearing this vow of Laylā, Majnūn reaction is also noteworthy here – he leaves as the most elated of men, having now that he has this information:

So he left her and was among the most joyous of men, and he said:

I think that passion for her will leave me in a wilderness, without goods,
without a family.
Without anyone to turn to with my last will and testament,
With only my camel and saddle as friends.
My love for her has eclipsed all previous affections
and taken a place which nothing before had taken.⁴⁸

(p. 46)

Yet another example of Laylā's poetry is the following couplet, in which she invokes social protection for her itinerant lover during his return journey to her:

Would that I knew, while dangers are so many
when Qays's camel will be set off for return
May my soul be ransom for the one who does not prepare his camel,
and the one who is led astray if God does not protect him.

(p. 87)

Laylā as maternal figure and consoler to the lover-boy

Laylā as beloved can also be maternal. In the passage here, two things stand out: it contains an element rarely present in the romance, that is, the involvement of the lover's mother and, in this particular passage, Laylā and Majnūn's mother are aligned with one another. At his mother's behest, Laylā secretly leaves her tribal quarter to visit Majnūn.

When Qays Ibn Al-Mulawwah's mind became disordered and he abandoned food and drink, his mother betook herself to Laylā and said to her: Indeed, Qays' love for you has robbed him of his senses and he has forsaken sustenance. If you were to go see him . . . I think his sanity would return. Laylā then said: Not during the day, since I do not trust what may happen to me at the hands of my clan, but during the night – [yes]. So she went to him during the night and related to him: "Qays, your mother claims that you went mad because of me and that you have left food and drink. Fear God and have mercy on yourself." He began to weep and then he recited:

She said: 'You have lost your mind over me.' I said to her
 Love is greater than what [afflicts] the madmen;
 One entrusted with love, the possessor [sāhib] of love does not recover
 from it for eternity,
 Whereas the madman is only felled by it for a time.

Then she wept with him and the two conversed almost until dawn, when she bid him farewell and departed.

(p. 36)

The first conversation and encounter – that between the mother and beloved Laylā – is centered on both trying to restore nurturance and life to Majnūn. His mother actually seeks and travels to Laylā and commiserates with her, as well as hatches a plan: go visit Majnūn and maybe he will come back to life and eat once more. The second conversation and encounter – the one between lover and beloved – is focused upon Laylā gently remonstrating with Majnūn and urging him to "Fear God and have mercy on yourself." In this exchange, she invokes Majnūn's mother and, again, the imagery of food and drink is suggestive of a maternal nurturance of Majnūn. Evidently, Laylā's decision to visit Majnūn at his mother's request entailed many hazards and, hence, it is quite realistically framed by Laylā's comment to his mother regarding the need for secrecy and invisibility during the visit: "Not during the day, since I do not trust what may happen to me at the hands of my clan, but during the night – [yes]." Despite this maternal advice and counsel of both mother and female beloved, what does Majnūn do? He recites poetry, weeps and converses with her. The admonishment of his beloved and invocation of his mother matter little. What matters is Love, for it inspires his poetry – his poetic persona: "Love is greater than what [afflicts] the madmen." He lives for this intimate poetic speech and, conversely, this intimate discourse is made part

of the coupling and pairing of the lovers. In spite of the risks involved, the lovers converse until dawn.

We also have here a cogent example of what El-Cheikh describes as the dominant ‘Abbāsīd imperial culture’s reliance upon gender constructs to explain the “uncivilized” nature of other groups.”⁴⁹ This narrative is accompanied by a normative Islamic textual vein in the romance that portrays Majnūn as one who has been reduced to being an uncivilized “madman” and a “charmer, lover-boy” with a frivolous obsession with women. However, Majnūn’s mother is shown implying that were the beloved to visit him he would recover from his malady – rendering Laylā the source of his healing and illness. Yet another narrative from the *Majnūn Laylā* romance in which the theme of Laylā as consoler and “cure” for Majnūn is part of the following:

Some of the elders of Banī ‘Āmir told us that Majnūn was walking during his wildness and passed by the neighborhood of Laylā, when he suddenly found her and they recognized one another. So he was thunder-struck and fell on his face unconscious. A few young men came from the neighborhood of Laylā and they took him and wiped the dirt from his face, and they carried him on their chests and asked Laylā to stand up for him, and she softened for what she saw in him. Then she said: I cannot be exposed by this one, but Oh so-and-so – and she turned to her bondswoman – Go to Qays [i.e., Majnūn] and tell him: Laylā sends her greetings to you, and she says to you: be patient with what you are experiencing, for had I a way to cure your illness, I would protect you myself from it. Hence, the girl came to him and informed him of what she said. So he awoke and got up and said: Convey to her my greetings and tell her: How very far is that! You are my illness and my cure, and my life and my death is in your hands, and you control my misery and my long calamity, then he wept and began reciting [part of a long poem]:

A people may be tried but not like my trial
And there exists no lot like my lot in the misery with you.

(pp. 64–65)

As regards the subtexts in both these aforementioned selections, it is a woman who is cast as the cause of and blamed for the lover’s breakdown. Again, a woman, namely Laylā, is cast as both the affliction of and the cure for the pathetic victim, Majnūn; he is shown literally proclaiming: “You are my illness and my cure.” In both excerpts, Laylā is shown representing herself as the voice of normativity and female piety in her counsel to Majnūn to not ignore food and drink, as well as to be patient in his suffering.

Laylā as victim

Laylā is not just an agent of conflict, but also a passive victim of conflict in this ‘Abbāsīd-era romance. Unlike Majnūn, who is depicted as caught between

propriety and passion primarily because he has, in a sense, chosen to transgress established social norms, Laylā is shown trapped between these norms and her feelings for Majnūn through no fault of her own. She has no voice in silencing, or even rebuking, a man who has rendered her a public disgrace. She has no voice in legitimately disputing the slurs on her virginity occasioned by his indiscretion. She is the female space that has been tread upon by the trafficking of his verses and the female space that has been made impure, that has been impugned.

For Laylā, allegiance to honor means forsaking love. This is a major contradiction that characterizes her position and her identity. She is torn between her love for Majnūn and society. And she is victimized by both this society and the man she loves. In a narrative in which she blames herself as the cause of Majnūn's misfortune, she makes ideological "sense" of this contradiction by concurring with a pervasive patriarchal myth of the female as the source of male setbacks and defeats (for example, Adam's downfall attributed to Eve in the creation myth, Yusuf's tribulations due to deceit of Zulaykhā).⁵⁰

Then she wept until she fainted. When she recovered I asked her, "Who are you, O handmaiden of Allah?" She answered, "I am Laylā, the woman who brought doom to him, she who brought him no comfort." Never did I see sorrow and affliction equal to that of hers for Majnūn.

(p. 87)

Laylā's infatuation with Majnūn and attachment to him makes it all the more difficult for her to cope with the anguish and pain she feels as a result of his indiscretion and the scandal it causes. Her feelings for Majnūn are quite clearly revealed in several narratives and verses. According to one of the variants of the story that tells how they met, she falls in love with him before he does with her. The narrative states that Majnūn sets out one morning and comes upon Laylā sitting in the courtyard of her house when suddenly, upon seeing him (for the second time), "love for him cleaved to her heart and she had fallen in love with him." In another narrative, she is described as making great effort to please him upon their first meeting each other: "[H]e went to [visit] her and he greeted her and she returned the greeting. She went out of her way to be courteous to him and inquire after him. He sat with her and she conversed with him and he with her and so it increased. Each of the two took an interest in and was pleased with the other. This did not cease until evening" (pp. 44–45).

The intensity of her emotional reaction to his misconduct is evident in her encounter with Qays ibn Dharrīh. After her outburst regarding Majnūn's verses, Qays tries to mitigate her distress by pointing out that no harm was intended by Majnūn and that people were merely twisting and distorting his words. Then, according to the narrative, "She bowed her head for a long time and her tears were falling even while she was trying to hold them back. She wept . . . and then said: "Convey my greetings to my paternal cousin and tell him. . . . By God, my passion for you surpasses what you may find but I have no recourse, no way to you" (94).

Hence, Laylā is portrayed as the site where Majnūn's passion, in the form of rhetoric about love relations with a woman, conflicts with her father's honor and social values. Publicizing his intimacy with her is publicizing his claim over her, a claim that interferes with and threatens the claim her father has over her. She is the domain upon which the conflict or feud between the two men, her father and Majnūn, is inscribed.

Laylā's character thus polarizes the conflict in multiple ways in the romance. Frye notes that the "central female figure of a tragic action will often polarize the tragic conflict [for example, Eve, Helen]."⁵¹ It is worth noting that in any patriarchal model of society, the marginalized female domain paradoxically expresses resistance as well as compliance. Females as maidens, wives and mothers of (male) heirs function to uphold the very traditions and practices that marginalize them. In this sense, Laylā's character is set in opposition to that of Majnūn's: as a virgin female, she is the very conservator of values that Majnūn has almost flagrantly transgressed. As an agent of conflict, she herself ultimately expresses allegiance to the norms that he flaunts – the norms of her father. Through her poetry, she upholds the dichotomy of public versus private that Majnūn transgresses through his indiscretion.

Notes

- 1 Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Women, Islam and 'Abbāsīd Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 12–13.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Kristina Richardson, "Singing Slave Girls (Qiyān) of the 'Abbasid Court in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," in *Children in Slavery Through the Ages*, ed. Gwyn Campbell, et al. (Ohio: Ohio State Press, 2009), 4.
- 5 Ibid., 4, 12–13.
- 6 E. K. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), Chapter Three.
- 7 Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Women, Islam and 'Abbasid Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 12–13.
- 8 A recent exception is the Bahraini poet Qassim Haddad's contemporary re-reading of the classical romance of *Majnūn Laylā* – which caused much controversy in the country of Bahrain, and other areas of the Arab world.
- 9 Northrop Frye, *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 49.
- 10 Vadet has discussed the "conventions auxquelles un poète doit se conformer pour être promu à titre posthume, grâce à l'adab, au rang de héros de roman," including the convention whereby "plus cet objet leur est refusé . . . plus ils lui trouvent de douceur." J. Vadet, *L'Esprit courtois en Orient dans les cinq premiers Siècles de l'Hégire* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1968), 358–359.
- 11 Cristina D'Ancona, "Greek into Arabic," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third Edition, eds. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. http://dx.doi.org.ecl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27523 (2016).
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Frye, *Fools of Time*, 63.
- 14 Richardson, "Singing Slave Girls (Qiyān) of the 'Abbasid Court in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," 9–10.
- 15 [Text note provided]
- 16 Cf. glossary.

- 17 See section on 'Umar ibn Rabi'a in "ghazal," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. P.J. Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, Clifford Edmund Bosworth, E. J. van Donzel, and Wolfhart Heinrichs (2012).
- 18 'Umar ibn Abī Rabi'a, *Dīwān 'Umar* (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah al-Misrīyah al-Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1978), 53. Translation from A. J. Arberry's, *Arabic Poetry: A Primer for Students* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 40–41.
- 19 Here, the vocative address refers to the "eye" that gazes at the object of desire.
- 20 Female sexuality, too, is dichotomized in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance and other 'Udhri stories, but this split usually occurs in a single female character. She is halved into the star beloved and the wife/mother figure, or into the wild gazelle and the domestic ewe. It is through a representation and publicizing of her as a beloved gazelle (accomplished by the poet's serenading) that she is then initiated into wifehood or motherhood.
- 21 Ahmad Shawqī, *Majnūn Layla*, trans. A. J. Arberry (London: Luzac & Co., 1933), 11.
- 22 G. Van Gelder, "ta 'adjdub," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition. It "is literally 'amazement,' a term of rhetoric. It is found, together with its active counterpart *ta 'djīb* ('causing amazement') in the Aristotelian tradition (Ibn Sīnā, Hāzim al-Karṭājannī [*q. vv.*])." According to G Van Gelder, this "amazement", which is in fact usually "feigned amazement," is related to concepts such as *ighrāb* or *istighrāb* ("evoking wonder"), found in works of poetics since Kudāma b. Dja'far [*q. v.*], and lies at the basis of the common figure of *badī'* called *tadājāhul al- 'ārīf*, "feigned ignorance."
- 23 Lois Anita Giffen, *The Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 135. Arabic love literature, as Lois Giffen has points out, partakes in a trend in Arabic literature in general in which originality was deemed important even though mastery of form and content loomed large. "Originality under these conditions is often viewed as the improved rendering of traditional material."
- 24 "The so-called *Romance of Alexander* misattributed to Callisthenes, the nephew of Aristotle, was translated into Syriac, through which the Syriac-speaking world became acquainted with the Hellenistic legend of Alexander the Great (d. 323 BCE). This legacy prompted the first translations into Arabic. . . . The Syriac version generated Middle Eastern recensions, including Arabic, Persian (the *Iskandarnamah*), Ethiopic, Hebrew (in the first part of Sefer HaAggadah), Ottoman Turkish (14th century), and Middle Mongolian (13th-14th century). The story of Dhul-Qarnayn in the Quran (Sura *al-Kahf* 18: 83–98) matches the Gog and Magog episode of the *Romance*, which has caused some controversy among Islamic scholars (see Alexander the Great in the Quran). Alexander was identified in Persian and Arabic-language sources as "Dhū-'l Qarnayn," Arabic for the "Horned One," likely a reference to the ram horns the image of Alexander wears on coins minted during his rule to indicate his descent from the Egyptian god Amun. Islamic accounts of the Alexander legend, particularly in Persia, combined the Pseudo-Callisthenes material with indigenous Sasanian Middle Persian ideas about Alexander." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_romance
- 25 Arazi, A. and Y. Meron, "Waṣf," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Al-Isfahānī, "Majnūn Laylā," Vol. 2: 83: "And Ibn al-'Arabi said: 'This, by Allah is among the best of words and of revised poetry.'"
- 28 Arazi, A. and Y. Meron, "Waṣf," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibn Ḥazm, *The Ring of the Dove: A Treatise on the Art and Practice of Arab Love*, trans. A. J. Arberry (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1953).
- 31 Toril Moi, "The Missing Mother: The Oedipal Rivalries of Rene Girard." *Diacritics* 12 (Summer, 1982), 22.
- 32 Two phases mark the choosing of the scapegoat according to Rene Girard: All sacrificial rites are based on two substitutions. The first is provided by generative violence, which substitutes a single victim for all members of the community. The second, the

only strictly ritualistic substitution, is that of a victim for the surrogate victim. As we know, it is essential that the victim be drawn from outside the community. The surrogate victim, by contrast, is a member of the community. . . . The need for some distinction between the *original victim* and the *ritual victims* can readily be explained. If the sacrificial victim belonged to the community (as does the surrogate victim), then his death would promote further violence instead of dispelling it." René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 269.

- 33 The root 'r-r meaning "to sacrifice" yields the word 'atīra, which is defined as "a ewe offered in sacrifice to idols." Also see t-y-m for etymological links between love and sacrifice. Consult Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 vols (Lahore: Islamic Book Centre, 1978). Also, J. G. Hava, *Al-Al-Farā'id Arabic-English Dictionary* (Beirut: Catholic Press, 1964).
- 34 See, for example, the famous description of "an 'egg' of the curtained quarters" in "The Mu'allāqah of Imru' al-Qays" or the lesser known verses of al-Muraqqish al-Akbar in Abū al-'Abbās al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī's al-Mufaddaliyyat, ed. Charles J. Lyall (Beirut: Matba'at al-Ābā' al-Yasū'iyyun, 1920), 3: 460.
- 35 W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Semites* (New York: Routledge, 2017 [1894]), 463.
- 36 In the Mu'allāqah of al-Hārith, we find the following verse: "[You act] against us, falsely and oppressively, as the deer are sacrificed in place [of sheep] from the fold of the flock." Commentators note that the Arabs in old times were accustomed to hunt and kill a wild goat [antelope or deer] instead of sacrificing a sheep. *Diwān of al-Hārith b. Hillizah*, ed. Hashim al-Ta'ān (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Irshād, 1969).
- 37 Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 276.
- 38 'Antarah, *Dīwan* (Bayrut: Dār Sādir, 1966), 28.
- 39 *Qays Lubnā*, 9: 189. Also cited in Hilary Kilpatrick, "Ahbār Manzūma: The Romance of Qays and Lubnā in the Aḡānī," in *Festschrift Ewald Wagner Zum 65. Geburtstag, Studien zur Arabischen Dichtung, Band 2* (Beirut: Beirut Texts and Studies, 1994), 352.
- 40 This translation is a modification of a translation inside an existing work: Ahmad Shawqī's, *Majnūn Layla*, trans. A. J. Arberry (London: Luzac & Co., 1933).
- 41 According to Suzanne Stetkevych, in pre-Islamic poetry the wolf, often linked with hunger and liminality, is an outcast figure that inhabits a desert wasteland. In this narrative, the figure of the hungry wolf acquires a different meaning. Stetkevych, *Mute*, 272.
- 42 In Muḥammad al-Daylamī's *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, we find another set of verses with the symbolism of the owl:

If our owls meet after our death
When slabs have been set over our graves
The owl of my grave, though I be a decayed cadaver,
Will be gay and rapturous at the cry of Laylā's owl

This mystical love treatise was composed at least thirty or more years after al-Isfahani wrote the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* in his *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. In the aforementioned verses, which the Shirazi al-Daylamī transmits, we can see the extent to which later textual material of a Persian mystical cultural cast regarding Majnūn aims to portray the two lovers as somehow fated, star-crossed lovers, dying out of love for each other, and their deaths occurring in close proximity in time and space.

- 43 This translation is a modification of a translation inside an existing work: Ahmad Shawqī's, *Majnūn Layla*, trans. A. J. Arberry (London: Luzac & Co., 1933).
- 44 Abū 'l-Hasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, trans. Joseph Norment Bell and Hassan Mahmood Abdul Latif Al Shafie (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2005), 35 (ff 49). An alternate reading is based on the premise that in pre-Islamic poetry the owl's cry represents the soul of an unavenged man. Avenging the

blood of one wrongly slain was very much a part of pre-Islamic tribal custom. Indeed, an aspect of the law of vengeance – which according to Joseph Schacht was adopted wholesale from pre-Islamic custom into Islamic law – was the legal right on the part of the family of the slain to be compensated in some shape or form by the slayer and/or his kin. According to this reading, the symbolism of the owl in the relevant verses is appropriate given the fact that Majnūn's blood-vengeance right (that is, his family's entitlement to compensation were he to be slain by Laylā's folks) has been rendered legally obsolete by the provincial authorities.

45 Stetkevych, *Mute*, 251–252.

46 Al-Isfahānī, "*Majnūn Laylā*," 2: 1; 13–14; 16; 30–31.

47 *Ibid.*, 46.

48 Modified version of Alessio Bombaci's translation in Fuzūlī, *Leylā and Mejnūn*, history of the poem, notes by Alessio Bombaci, trans. Sofi Huri (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970), 57.

49 El Cheikh, *Women, Islam and 'Abbāsīd Identity*, 15.

50 Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion: Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 48.

51 Frye, *Fools of Time*, 67.

8 ‘Abbāsīd readings of the ‘Uḏhrī romances

Female unchastity and the love triangle

The Umayyad ‘Uḏhrī romances – as codified, constructed in and viewed through an ‘Abbāsīd lens – are only ostensibly about a monogamous bond between a pair of lovers. In reality they are characterized by a sexualized ‘Abbāsīd subtext which renders this corpus of love stories “adult-rated”: that is, a third party is always present and the configuration of erotic bonds is triangular and scarcely chaste.¹ According to ‘Abbāsīd readings of alterity, according to the ‘Abbāsīd processes of primitivizing and exotification of the ‘Uḏhrī models of femininity and masculinity, these love stories contain a powerful latent theme in which the male lover’s exposure of the secrecy of the female beloved (here akin to female unchastity) is sensualized and sensationalized. A dialectic of secrecy and revelation characterizing these love stories suggests that ultimately it is the unchastity, rather than the virginity, of the ‘Uḏhrī beloved that is deemed desirable. Secrecy is sexualized and rendered of primary importance in the ‘Abbāsīd processes of primitivizing and exotification of female chastity. In this view, both verbal discretion (not speaking *of* or *about* or *to* her) as well as physical segregation (veiling and concealment of a woman’s body) are linked with the preservation of her virginity.² This ‘Abbāsīd sexualized subtext functions in the romances as a narrative imperative – that is, mandated by the narrative thread of the romances in question. In other words, there exists a narrative imperative to the creation of these triangles, and often the end of the triangle signals the end of the lover’s centrality in the love story’s narrative. In this chapter, I examine these three elements: the existence of these love triangles; its relation to female unchastity in the ‘Uḏhrī love stories (especially in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance); and the dynamic of narrative imperative.

Once Bedouin female chastity is partly defined in terms of secrecy in and through ‘Abbāsīd processes of primitivizing and exotification, then its violation (that is, the divulgence of the beloved as secret) is rendered an inevitability, given the dialectic of the secret (i.e. a secret is not a secret until it is revealed) also characterizing these love stories.³ Importantly, this divulgence is sensualized in the sense that it consists of a poetic unveiling: only a woman who has been “unveiled” in and through poetry composed *about* her by a male lover is deemed desirable enough to exist in the love story and, importantly, deemed desirable enough to merit a husband. It is worth noting that the romance genre, in the Arab context, often assigns the male gender to revelation just as it assigns the female gender to

secrecy. Since secrecy plays such an important role in the male lover's perception and experience of female sexuality, secrecy itself is gendered as feminine.⁴

Structurally, there exist two types of triangular configurations. Both ultimately result in a situation whereby the 'Uḏhrī Bedouin lover "romantically and tragically loses" his beloved to a third party who marries her. In the first type of configuration, the poet-lover may be either betrothed or married to his beloved when he suddenly loses her to another man. We see this occur in the 'Uḏhrī romances of *Qays Lubnā* and *'Urwa 'Afra*. In the second, more prevalent, type, the 'Uḏhrī lover, though not formally attached to his beloved, symbolically or verbally possesses her through the notoriety of his verse, and then loses her to a third party precisely because of this transgression (this occurs in *Majnūn Laylā* and *Jamīl Buthayna*). In both cases, the third party to whom the 'Uḏhrī lover loses his beloved marries the woman in question.

Whether a man is shown attached to or courting a woman, he is always losing her to another man such that it seems a woman is not meant to be kept by one man but circulated, both literally and figuratively, among men. Often, a man's speech with a woman or about a woman mars her purity, and as soon as this occurs he loses her to another man. Two levels may be discerned within the text of the 'Abbāsīd codified and constructed 'Uḏhrī romance. On a surface level, speech with or about a woman is rendered taboo, for as soon as the lover speaks about her, he tragically loses her to another man. A lover's revelation of a beloved is shown to have tragic consequences. But on a more fundamental level, speech about a woman is what permits bonding between men, whether the relations are between male poets, or between poets and husbands. In a sense, her unchastity facilitates a type of homosocial bonding between men. Only ostensibly does speech about a woman become taboo, because actually such speech acts as the medium through which men bond with each other. This homosocial bonding between men is thus only made possible at the tragic expense of the heterosexual relation between the lover and beloved. The dramatizing of a woman's reputed loss of chastity, the rendering of this loss as both romantically tragic and exotic, functions to conceal the homosocial components in these 'Abbāsīd romances.

Ḥaḥṣa and her husbands

The ninth-century 'Abbāsīd litterateur al-Jāḥiẓ in his *Risālat al-Qiyān*, or *Epistle on Singing Girls*, relays a narrative unit that illuminates certain aspects of the love triangles found in *Majnūn Laylā* and the other Uḏhrī love stories. Al-Jāḥiẓ relates:

Al-Ḥasan b. 'Al-Ḥasan married Ḥaḥṣa ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān; but al-Mundhir b. al-Zubayr was in love with her. Now something [of gossip] about her reached al-Ḥasan, so he divorced her. Al-Mundhir then proposed to her, but she refused him, saying, "He has exposed [*shahaharnī*] me." 'Āsim b. 'Umar b. al-Khattab then asked to wed her, and she married him.⁵ But al-Mundhir conveyed some scandal about her to 'Āsim and he divorced her, and al-Mundhir then asked to marry her. It was now said to her, "Marry him so that people learn that he slandered you." So she married him, and people realized

that he had lied about her. Then al-Ḥasan told 'Āsim to ask al-Mundhir for permission for him to visit her and have a talk with her [*yadkhulu ilayhā wa yataḥaddathu 'indahā*]. They did this, and al-Mundhir sought the counsel of this brother 'Abdallah, who told him to let them in. So they came in, and she paid more attention to 'Āsim than to al-Ḥasan, for he was more at ease in conversation. Then al-Ḥasan said to al-Mundhir, "Take your wife's hand"; he did so, and al-Ḥasan and 'Āsim got up and left. But al-Ḥasan was in love with her, and he had only divorced her because al-Mundhir had levelled a charge [against her]. One day, al-Ḥasan said to Ibn Abī 'Atīq, "How about a trip to 'Aqīq?"⁶ They started out, but al-Ḥasan turned aside to Ḥafṣa's house and went in to [see] her, and they had a long conversation before he came out. Later on he said to Ibn Abī 'Atīq, "How about a trip to 'Aqīq?" to which he agreed. But al-Ḥasan [again] stopped at Ḥafṣa's house and went in. At another time, he said the same thing, but Ibn Abī 'Atīq said, "Brother, why do you not just say, How about a trip to Ḥafṣa?"⁷

There are many striking features about this passage. Among the most striking is that a (marital) relation between two parties – a man and a woman – is repeatedly disrupted, and the form of disruption is always the introduction of a male third party.

Another way of expressing this is that Ḥafṣa is made the object of a man's desire primarily when she is attached to another man. First, she is the object of al-Mundhir's desire when she is al-Ḥasan's wife. Then she (who was the object of al-Mundhir's desire when married to al-Ḥasan, suddenly) becomes the object of al-Ḥasan's love interest again once she is married to al-Mundhir – although the narrative clearly states that al-Ḥasan had been in love with her from the start.⁸

It is also striking that the marriage of al-Mundhir, which spells the end of his courtship of Ḥafṣa, ends his primacy in the romance narrative. Only while he is the third party who is interested in Ḥafṣa, a married woman, is the narrative focus of the anecdote upon him. But once the marriage between al-Mundhir and Ḥafṣa takes place, and al-Mundhir is no longer the third party, the narrative suddenly shifts attention from him to al-Ḥasan. Al-Ḥasan (the former husband) usurps al-Mundhir's role as the potential third party lover once the latter marries her, and accordingly, he also usurps al-Mundhir's place in the narrative.

In *Majnūn Laylā* and in the other 'Uḏhrī love stories, the third party role initially is enacted by the 'Uḏhrī lover; however, it is subsequently usurped by the beloved's husband or another rival suitor. In the beginning, the particular romance under consideration is characterized by a triangular configuration that consists of the beloved, her father and Majnūn as the lover, but once Laylā marries Ward ibn Thaḳīf, this configuration takes the form of the beloved, the lover and the husband. What is noteworthy is that the romance plot always dramatically depicts the beloved as either being in the possession of or becoming the possession of a man other than the 'Uḏhrī lover (be this man the beloved's father or husband). Majnūn cannot marry his beloved, for marriage to her would mean the end of the triangle and therefore the end of the lover's centrality in this narrative.⁹ The 'Uḏhrī lover continues endlessly to desire his beloved because the narrative mandates his remaining center stage in the romance for heightening 'Abbāsīd male audiences'

pleasures and entertainment. Structurally, the beloved's continuing inaccessibility to Majnūn – symbolized in her attachment to, first, a father, and then, a husband – becomes a narrative imperative in the romance. This is yet an important reason why the slandered woman in *Majnūn Laylā* does not marry her slanderer, whereas in the anecdote cited earlier she does marry the man who slanders her. Unlike the character of al-Mundhir in the aforementioned anecdote, Majnūn cannot relinquish his primacy in the romance narrative.

Yet another feature that is made prominent in the aforementioned narrative about Ḥaḥṣa is the importance of language and speech, in particular in the male-male bonds that link members of the love triangles. Here the links in Arabic literature between speech and male virility, between conversation and sexuality, are very pronounced. Ḥaḥṣa's circulation among her husbands parallels the circulation of slanderous speech *about* her among her husbands. The motif of "exposure" through speech of a sexualized nature is an aspect of the relations between the men in these stories, all of whom occupy, at one time or another, the role of husband. An "unchaste" woman is bandied from one man to another because unchaste speech about her is passed from one man to another. The desire of al-Mundhir, the principal slanderer, for Ḥaḥṣa is generated and then expressed through his 'unchaste' speech about her to her husbands. As occurs with Laylā, who is exposed through Majnūn's poetry in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, Ḥaḥṣa is exposed and maligned through al-Mundhir's speech in the anecdote. The verb that Ḥaḥṣa uses in describing the way al-Mundhir has scandalized her is *shahhara* which means "to divulge, to publicize," and in the romance of Majnūn Laylā, too, this verb frequently is employed to describe Majnūn's indiscretions regarding Laylā. In this anecdote also, it is the very act of a man's revelation, of putting to expression his desire for a woman, that mars her virgin reputation. Unchaste speech is what links al-Mundhir to Ḥaḥṣa as well as al-Mundhir to her husbands. Unchaste speech about Ḥaḥṣa ruptures the marital bond between her and al-Ḥasan, her first husband, but subsequently, speech or converse once again re-ignites her as an object of desire in al-Ḥasan. Once Ḥaḥṣa is married to al-Mundhir, she then becomes once more the object of al-Ḥasan's love desire and the partner of his conversation.

Once al-Ḥasan, her former husband, experiences a renewal of love and desire for Ḥaḥṣa, he seeks to express it by creating opportunities to talk to her. The passage shows him visiting her at least three times and, on each occasion, what the narrative stresses is that he converses with her or that they both converse. Another indication of the link between sex and speech is made evident through the narrative's repeated coupling of the verb *dakhala* (to visit, to enter, to go in) with *tahaddatha* (to converse), especially since the semantic range of the root of *dakhala* also includes the meaning of "to go into a woman, to have intercourse." The equivalency between speech and sex are also obvious in the passage's description of the initial meeting between Ḥaḥṣa and her ex-husbands: "So they came in, and she paid more attention to 'Āsim than to al-Ḥasan, for he was more at ease in conversation. Then, al-Ḥasan said to al-Mundhir, 'Take your wife's hand'; he did so, and al-Ḥasan and 'Āsim got up and left." Here Ḥaḥṣa is depicted as flirting with

'Āsim as a consequence of his ease in conversation. This arouses the jealousy of al-Ḥasan (and jealousy here intermingles with desire), such that he feels compelled to ask Ḥafṣa's husband to make a display of his marital ownership of her by "taking her hand," thus forcing the two ex-husbands to disengage themselves from her and take their leave.

Importantly, we notice how the scene of this meeting between Ḥafṣa and her ex-husbands – especially al-Ḥasan's request of the intervention of the husband – demonstrates a point made earlier: that just as soon as an interaction between a woman and a man appears promising in terms of sexuality and desire, the narrative finds a means to disrupt it.

In the 'Abbāsīd-inflected adult qualities of the 'Uḏhrī romances, too, a depiction of a dyadic relation or interaction is often disrupted or extended to include a third party. The interaction may be between a man and a woman or between two men, but the narrative simply does not rest easy with this communication between two parties. Only the addition of a third party "completes" the narrative scene. Regardless of the initial pairing, the resulting triangular configuration is almost always that of two men and one woman (or group of women).

The poet-visitor and the triangle

Next, I discuss two different narratives that present triangulated configurations involving a poet-visitor as well as the romance characters of poet-lover and beloved. The narratives are selected from the *Aghānī* renditions of the 'Uḏhrī romances of *Majnūn Laylā* and *Jamīl Buthayna*, respectively. In the first configuration, the poet-lover sends a fellow poet (poet-visitor) to visit his beloved.¹⁰ In the second, a fellow poet *appoints* himself as a visitor to the poet-lover's beloved. As I have discussed earlier, this visit is a distinct component of courtship in the medieval Arabic romances. If a lover's visit to the beloved has erotic significance, it may be inferred that a lover's friend's visit to the beloved is also laden with such significance. What is interesting is that the visit in each of the two stories marks the disruption (followed by the extension) of a rather cozy interaction between two men: the romance's poet-lover and his fellow poet-visitor. In both cases, the interaction between two men (that is, the poet-lover and the poet-visitor) is extended to include an exchange between a man and a woman (that is, between the poet-visitor and the poet-lover's beloved). Always hovering around each exchange between visitor and beloved is the shadow of the bond between the beloved and her lover who has approved and/or dispatched the visitor in the first place.

In the first configuration of the visit from the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, Majnūn and a fellow poet, Qays ibn Dharrīḥ, are portrayed as meeting and bonding with each other after a long time. Then Majnūn asks the latter to visit his beloved, Laylā.

Qays ibn Dharrīḥ came across Majnūn while he was sitting by himself in his tribe's assembly place (*nādī*). Each of them had been longing to meet the

other. Majnūn, before becoming a wild man, used to sit by himself only and not talk to anyone, nor respond to anyone addressing him, nor greet anyone greeting him. Then, Qays ibn Dharīḥ greeted him and he leapt up and hugged him, saying: Hello to you, my brother! By God, I am of unsound mind and preoccupied, so do not pain me. The two talked for awhile and commiserated and wept with one another. Then, Majnūn said to him: My brother, Laylā's encampment is nearby. Would you go to her and convey to her my greetings? He said to him: I will do it. So Qays ibn Dharīḥ proceeded until he reached Laylā, then he greeted her and made his genealogical introductions. She said to him: Greetings to you. Do you need anything? He said: Yes, your paternal cousin sent me to you with his *salāms*. She bowed her head in silence and then said: You would not have been greeted had I known that you were his messenger.

(pp. 93–94)

The homosocial bonding between Majnūn and his fellow poet (also his bard) is foregrounded in this passage. Through the mention of how they have been yearning to meet each other, through the emphasis on the disparity between the fact that Majnūn ignores all people around him and how enthusiastically he receives Qays, as well as through the portrayal of the way they “commiserated and wept with one another,” the intimacy shared by them is made prominent. Then, suddenly, the narrative focus shifts from the relation between Qays and Majnūn to the interaction between Qays and Majnūn's beloved, Laylā. The passage executes this shift by depicting Majnūn as asking his “brother” to visit Laylā.

The question arises, why does the narrative do this? In other words, why is Majnūn shown suddenly to be desiring that Qays visit his beloved? There is no tryst to be confirmed, no message to be conveyed except greetings. The conveyance of greetings appears to be a pretext for something else.

To probe the reasons for this narrative shift, we examine the passage cited next from the romance of *Jamīl Buthayna*. This passage is preceded by a scene in which Jamīl and 'Umar ibn Abī Rabia, the rakish love poet (not an 'Uḍhrī poet), are depicted meeting and trading verses with each other, much like the portrayal of the meeting between Majnūn and Qays. Again, rather abruptly, the narrative focus jumps from an account of the interaction between the two poets to a description of an exchange involving 'Umar and Jamīl's beloved, Buthayna. In contrast to what happens in the *Majnūn Laylā* anecdote, 'Umar himself takes the liberty of deciding to visit

Jamīl's beloved. He designates himself as a messenger and asks Jamīl to accompany him on a visit to Buthayna. Jamīl declines and urges 'Umar to go visit her nonetheless, and when 'Umar arrives at Buthayna's camp and meets her, she has a surprising announcement for him.

Then 'Umar said to him: accompany me to Buthayna's so that we may offer [her] our greetings. Jamīl replied: The sultan has already declared my blood legal if they [her folk] find me there, so you betake yourself to her tents.

'Umar set out until he reached her abode, and [once there], he made himself sociable until he was spoken to. [When addressed] he stated: O lass, I am 'Umar ibn Abī Rabi'a, hence, apprise Buthayna of my presence (*makānī*). Buthayna then came out to him and said: By God, 'Umar, I am not among those women of yours which insist that passion for you has slain them! So, 'Umar was routed.¹¹

Again, the question arises, why does the narrative show 'Umar as desiring to visit another poet-lover's beloved? It is unlikely that 'Umar's desire to visit Buthayna is simply out of his sense of companionship with Jamīl. That he may have an amorous agenda – perhaps latent – is suggested by Buthayna's announcement to him once he encounters her. She summarily announces to him that she is not part of his female cortege, that she is not one of the many women slain by love for him.

In effect, Buthayna signals to 'Umar that she is Jamīl's supreme 'Uḏhrī beloved and not 'Umar's latest love victim. Actually, 'Umarī poetry and narratives may present an inverse of the 'Uḏhrī position on the relation between the beloved and lover. In the 'Uḏhrī romances, the male poet-lover is the one to be slain and the woman is the slayer, whereas in the 'Umarī material, the male lover frequently occupies the role of the slayer and his female paramours are the ones to be slain. Bouhdiba and other critics have noted that, whereas "in Bedouin love, we have the beloved, desired woman who is impossible to possess . . . in the urban view, we have the vainglory and swagger of the lover, desired by the ladies, but himself haughty, insensitive and blase."¹²

The probability that 'Umar's visit to Buthayna has erotic undertones induces us to consider whether Qays' visit to Laylā is characterized by such undertones too. True, 'Umar is a self-appointed visitor of Buthayna, but he does obtain Jamīl's backing for his venture. Jamīl, in a sense, is complicit with 'Umar's amorous foray because he not only declines the latter's request to go with him, but urges him to visit Buthayna anyway. Qays, unlike 'Umar, is appointed as visitor/messenger to Laylā by Majnūn himself. But it is what precedes each visit that sheds light on its homoerotic nature.

What prefaces Qays' visit to Laylā and 'Umar's visit to Buthayna is an intense exchange of intimacy between the two male poet-lovers in each narrative. Just as Majnūn and Qays are shown celebrating the bond between them, likewise Jamīl and 'Umar are depicted swapping verses with each other and marveling over each other's poetic abilities. Jamīl is shown fawning over 'Umar's poetic language. The answer to the question of why the narrative depicts Majnūn as suddenly wishing for Qays to visit his beloved or 'Umar as desiring to visit another poet-lover's beloved is simply that the narrative necessitates the completion of the erotic triangle. In other words, Qays must be dispatched to Laylā and 'Umar dispatched to Buthayna immediately after each of the two pairs of male poets have been having a cozy *tete-à-tete* because it is at that juncture that each poet-visitor has the license to model or mimic intimacy with the romance poet-lover's beloved. It is just after Majnūn and Qays have commiserated soulfully over their plight as poet-lovers that the former desires his 'Uḏhrī partner to have a conversation with

his beloved. The narrative seems to necessitate the addition of a third relation soon after a renewal of relations between the fellow poets. Hence, it introduces a "visit motif" that leads to an interaction between the fellow poet and the beloved of the romance.

In each passage, however, the beloved is a rather uncooperative member of the homoerotic triangle. Buthayna immediately rejects 'Umar's overture and Laylā initially tells Qays that she would not have even greeted him had she known that he had been sent by Majnūn, her lover.

Beauty, beast, and the triangle

The love story of *Qays Lubnā* is among the most effective illustrations of the importance of the third party motif in the 'Abbāsīd-era creation of the 'Uḍhrī corpus.¹³ Unlike other 'Uḍhrī stories, in the *Qays Lubnā* romance, Qays marries his beloved, Lubnā, only to divorce her. Soon after the divorce, Qays hears that Lubnā has remarried and broken-heartedly regrets having given her up to another man. In the account cited here, he suddenly discovers that he has symbolically re-enacted this transfer of his wife by unwittingly selling his she-camel to the man who is now her husband. This anecdote is found in the tenth-century 'Abbāsīd *Kitāb al-Aghānī* version of the story, but not in Ibn Qutayba's ninth-century edition.

Qays took his camels and proceeded with them to the city. He had just begun to exhibit them when Lubnā's husband started bargaining with him for a she-camel . . . [but] they did not recognize one another. So he sold her to him. Then [Lubnā's] husband said to him: When morn arrives, stop by the abode of Kathīr ibn al-Saltī and get your money. [Qays] said: Fine. Lubnā's husband went to her and said: I have purchased a she-camel from a man of Bedouin folk and he is coming tomorrow to get the money for her, so prepare a meal for him.¹⁴ So she did. When it was morning, Qays arrived and called out to the servant: Tell your master that the owner of the she-camel is by the door. Lubnā then recognized the tone of his voice but did not say a thing. Her husband said to the servant: Tell him to enter. He entered and sat down. Lubnā said to the servant: Say to him, "O young man, why is it that you appear so disheveled and dusty?" She [the servant] said this to him. He took a deep breath and spoke to her: Such is the condition of one who has forsaken love and chosen death over life. And he wept. Next, Lubnā said to her: Tell him "Talk to us about yourself." When he began to converse, she lifted the curtain and announced: Enough! We already know your account. And she dropped the curtain. He remained speechless for awhile, not talking, then he suddenly burst out weeping and arose and exited. Her husband called out to him: Woe to thee! What is your story? Come back and get the price for your she-camel, and if you want, we will increase it for you. [Qays] did not speak to him . . . [but] mounted his stirrup and left. Lubnā said to her husband: Alas! That was Qays ibn Dharrīḥ. How can you bear what you did to him? He said: I did not

recognize him. On the way, Qays began to cry and bewail himself . . . for what he had done.¹⁵

We notice that, in the passage's beginning, the triangulation takes the form of two men and a female animal and the narrative focus is mainly upon the interaction between the two men, Qays and Lubnā's husband. Then, in the second-half of the passage, a woman, Lubnā, is substituted for the female animal and the focus of the narrative shifts to an exchange between this woman and a man. Just as, in the anecdotes cited earlier, the visit marked the disruption or extension of the male-male interaction to include a male-female one, in this narrative, the sale or exchange of the she camel symbolically inaugurates the addition of a male-female interaction to the existing one between the two men.

Lubnā's role in the male-female exchange is noteworthy. She is shown first baiting the lover into deliberately relating his tale of love's woes, and then curtly silencing him through the revelation of her identity to him ("She lifted the curtain and said: Enough! We already know your account"). In a sense, she rebukes him for peddling a story about her after he has already peddled her as a woman (that is, divorced her). Here it may be pointed out that, unlike what occurs in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, Lubnā is bandied about from one man to another before gossip about her is peddled, whereas Laylā, on the other hand, is circulated after scandalous speech about her is peddled. In the narrative quoted here, Lubnā diminishes the lover's rhetoric because she is tired of it, especially since his rhetoric ultimately is more about self-love than love of her. Not surprisingly, given that the passage began with a dialogue between the two men, Lubnā's husband, unlike Lubnā, is interested in hearing all of Qays' story ("Woe to thee! What is your story? Come back and get the price!"). Lubnā, by contrast, does not want to be the audience for a tale that peddles her as a featured attraction. Lubnā's action here appears similar to that of Laylā in the *Majnūn Laylā* anecdote in which she silences Majnūn's conversation by turning her attention away from him and toward another man.

The lover spurned is the lover spurred

The narrative in which Laylā leaves Majnūn speechless by suddenly ignoring him and flirting with another man is actually the second of two consecutive anecdotes in which Majnūn is spurned by his female audience. In the first, not just one woman (Laylā) but a bevy of young women lose interest in the poet when another man, a goatherd, appears on the scene. It is always toward a male third party, whether it is the goatherd or the man to whom Laylā whispers a secret in the two anecdotes to be discussed shortly or Lubnā's husband in the episode cited earlier, that the women are shown turning. In the following two anecdotes, offered here again, it is Majnūn who has to contend with a third party.

In the first scene he is passed by a woman from his tribe, known as Karīma, and

with her was a group of women chattering and among them was Laylā. . . . They [the women] were pleased by his beauty and perfection, so they invited

him to dismount and converse. He dismounted and began to talk with them and he ordered a slave of his that was with him to slay for them his [al-Majnūn's] she-camel and he did so. He continued to converse with them for the remainder of the day. While he was so [doing], there appeared before them a young man, wearing a Bedouin garment, who was known as Munāzil, and [who] was driving some of his goats. When they saw him, they drew near to him and abandoned al-Majnūn. Thus, he became angry and departed from them reciting:

Do I slay my she-camel for the sake of Karīma,
and then find that my arrival paved the way for the arrival of Munāzil?!
When he arrived, they tinkled their ornaments, yet when I came,
I was not given the pleasure of those anklets' sound.

(pp. 12–13)

Another version of this narrative continues thus:

The youth said: Come on! Let us duel and engage in a shooting match with each other! [Majnūn] said to him: If you wish that then move to [a place] where you cannot see them and they cannot see you. Then whatever you wish, do. And he recited:

If we vie in a vacant place, I will overcome him.
But if he shoots his arrow in front of her,
then he is the winner over me.

(p. 30)

A variant of the anecdote subsequent to this offers this story:

He came upon Laylā sitting in the courtyard of her abode. Love for him had cleaved to her heart and she desired him. She had maidservants that were talking with her and he halted by them and greeted them. Then they invited him to dismount and said to him: How would you like to have a talk with someone who is not distracted from you by the likes of Munāzil? He said: Fine. He alighted and did what he had done the day before. She wanted to know – did he feel for her what she felt for him – so she began to turn away from his discourse time and time again and to talk with others. [Indeed] already there was in his heart love for her similar to her love for him, and he was enamored of her and found her pretty and engaging. While she was talking to him, there appeared, at that time, a young man from the tribal quarter. Then, she summoned him [the young man] and whispered to him a long secret.

(pp. 30–31)

Again, just when the situation appears to be promising between the male lover and his female fans, in both anecdotes it is disrupted through the arrival of a third party – that is, a male rival. In other words, it is exactly when the scene between the poet

and the women suggests that the latter have been captivated by his appearance and rhetorical skills, and he by their charm, that the romance narrative disrupts the harmony and introduces the presence of another man. Once the poet's courteous speech initiates his courtship of Laylā (or the women), along comes another man to claim her attention. Importantly, this other man always appears.

Here, the function of the third party's arrival partly is to displace the women's (or beloved's) attention away from the central male figure onto the new male arrival. This displacement, in turn, simply spurs the desire of the poet-lover. Thus, the appearance of a third-party rival lover ultimately functions to enhance Majnūn's desire for the women. The appearance of a rival third party makes him unbearably jealous and angry, and he is chiefly angry because of the women's shift of attention away from him. What also infuriates Majnūn is that it is the women who actively desire or shun the men. Certainly, from the male lover's view point, "the preferred female sexuality would be one which responded to the desire of others, rather than one which actively desired and sought a response."¹⁶ This explains why the women are the target of his unflattering verses; they are at fault for being capricious and inconstant: "When he [Munāzil] arrived, they tinkled their ornaments, yet when I came, I was not given the pleasure of those anklets' sound." Ironically, the threat of combat between the two men arises, in part, because of these verses. Munāzil views the couplet and the angry manner in which Majnūn declaims it as an affront to both him and the women, and he chivalrously rises to the occasion by issuing a challenge to the poet.

Majnūn's injunction to Munāzil to withdraw from the presence of the women belies his own anxiety about engaging in combat in front of the women.¹⁷ By stressing that he would lose the battle were the women to watch Munāzil, Majnūn implies that a display of physical prowess against an uncouth, randy Bedouin in front of the female audience would somehow detract from his refined status as a poet-lover. He feels compelled to maintain a kind of genteel, delicate presence in front of the women, a presence that would not allow him to win a physical struggle with another man. This aspect of his identity – the persona of a sentimental, swooning lover that he so carefully cultivates in the presence of women – would be threatened if he were to engage in a combative struggle. Such a display of physical prowess would also somehow undermine the importance of his image as a refined poet-lover. As a low-class goat-herd, Munāzil does not have to concern himself with these issues.

The numerous anecdotes offered in the following section are linked by one important factor: the triangulated exchange in them is based primarily on speech. In most of these narratives, the beloved is present in the triangle only through men's speech about her – which is to say, only semiotically. Two exceptions are the first two narratives to be cited, in which a woman actually appears as a character in the triangle.

Fire, butter, blood

In the passages shown here, triangulated exchanges occur between the two characters of the lover and the beloved, on the one hand, and the third party of either

the beloved's father or husband, on the other. The first two passages are from the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* and the third has been selected from *Kuthayyir 'Azza*, another 'Uḏhrī love story. What is immediately obvious are the structural and syntactic parallels between the two narratives from *Majnūn Laylā* and, following this, the structural and symbolic parallels between the first Majnūn passage and the excerpt from *Kuthayyir 'Azza*. Among the more curious parallels between the first Majnūn passage and the excerpt from *Kuthayyir 'Azza* is the important role of butter (*samn*)¹⁸ as a symbolic commodity in the triangulated exchanges characterizing each.

The following two excerpts from *Majnūn Laylā* both employ the Arabic rhetorical device of "*ta' ḍjīb* or *ta' ajjub* ('causing amazement').¹⁹ Illustrated in and through many narrative units in the love story, this literary device becomes one of many that dovetails nicely with the function of the subgenre of *tashbīb* (serenading or eulogizing the beloved).

I said to Qays ibn al-Mulawwah before he went mad: What is the most amazing of things that has struck you in your passion for Laylā? He said: Guests stayed with us [one] night and we did not have any victuals. So my father sent me to Laylā's father's abode, saying to me: Ask of him for food. I went to him and stood [outside] his tent and called out to him. He said: What do you want? I said: We have guests with us tonight but we have no food, so my father sent me to ask you for some fare. He said: Laylā, get out for him that churn and fill his vessel with butter. She took it out and I had with me a wooden cup and then she began to pour the butter in it while we conversed. The conversation distracted us while she poured the butter. The cup became full and we did not realize it and the butter flowed until our legs were [immersed] in [a pool of] butter. . . . He [Majnūn] said: So I came another night to ask for fire, and I was wrapped in a cloak I had, so she gave me the fire on a rag and we stood and spoke to one another, and when the rag would burn, I would tear a piece of my cloak to keep it burning, until nothing was left from my cloak except to cover my private parts, and I did not realize what I was doing.

(p. 32)

Here, the spontaneous exchange of words between Majnūn and Laylā (i.e., they "conversed" or they "stood and spoke to one another") provokes a disclosure of desire which is then metaphorized through either a fire burning out of control or an overflow of butter. The excesses in each narrative and certainly the symbolism, on the part of Majnūn, of "until nothing was left from my cloak except to cover my private parts, and I did not realize what I was doing," indicate the dangerous qualities in 'Abbāsīd discourses that concern *'Ishq* or passionate love. But both narrative units basically feature three parties: Majnūn, Laylā and, either explicitly or implicitly, Laylā's father.

In *Kuthayyir 'Azza*, we find the following story:

Kuthayyir (the lover) said: I went for pilgrimage one year, as did 'Azza's husband with her. No one from [among] us was aware of his companion's

[presence]. On the way, her husband commanded her to purchase butter with which to prepare food for the folk of his travelling entourage. She began to go around the tents, tent by tent, until she came to me not knowing it was my tent. I was making arrows. When I saw her, I kept cutting, while I was gazing at her, distractedly until I cut my [flesh down to the] bones several times. I did not feel anything [even though] my blood was flowing. When that became obvious, she came to me and gripped my hand and began to wipe the blood off it with her gown. I had a churn of butter and I made her swear to take it. So she took it and brought the butter to her husband. When he saw the blood, he asked her for information concerning it and she concealed it, until he swore she must tell him the truth and so she did. Then he hit her and swore that she must revile me to my face. So she stopped before me, having him with her, and said to me, weeping: "O son of a whore" and then they left.²⁰

Both Laylā's father and 'Azza's husband are shown asking the female beloved to fetch butter. But the beloved, in each narrative, is unable to follow these directions without problems, and these problems result from her contact with the lover. At the conclusion of each anecdote, Laylā's father and 'Azza's husband are confronted, respectively, with spilled butter and splotted blood. Laylā spills the butter as a result of her discourse with Majnūn and 'Azza stains herself with blood because of her contact with Kuthayyir's wound. Kuthayyir's gaze (the gaze causes him to wound himself) at the beloved 'Azza is parallel to Majnūn's converse with Laylā. In other words, it is through either the lover's gazing or his speaking with his beloved that the revelation of his desire results, and again, this revelation of desire is metaphorized as the flowing of blood and butter. Risky revelation of the male lover's desire is also foregrounded through the images of self-mutilation (Kuthayyir cutting himself) and nakedness (the exposure of Majnūn's genitalia due to the burning of his cloak) and flood-like immersion (the butter pooling around Majnūn's feet, his cup overflowing, due to his loss of self-control).²¹ Once again, both the excessive flow of words from Majnūn to Laylā and the copious flow of blood from Kuthayyir to 'Azza metaphorize the unchaste disclosure of desire.²²

Certainly in the second quotation, this male indiscretion symbolically violates the chastity of the beloved. The lover's blood literally stains the beloved's marital purity, signified by the stain on 'Azza's gown. Interestingly, the bleeding hand stains and brands the beloved's gown due to her protective, maternal response toward her lover. That the garment or her gown is stained is important: by staining the gown that clothes and conceals her body, the lover marks and mars her body. Female secrecy is exposed through the male lover's revelation. The bloodstain becomes the emblem of her unchastity, and the narrative relates that when her husband asks her to explain its presence, she conceals it (that is, the account of her interaction with Kuthayyir) until he forces her to talk and tell him the truth. However, in the first passage, it is less obvious whether the excess in words between Majnūn and Laylā, symbolized by the overflow of butter, mars the beloved's chastity. It is possible that excess and overflow here may be suggestive of a kind of impurity. Curiously, in most of these anecdotes it is the women who

are portrayed as the carriers of the butter. If the butter symbolism is linked with a chaste femininity, then its overflow and spilling into a pool around the lovers' legs – which renders the butter "unclean" – may be suggestive of a female chastity that has been defiled.

In the anecdote concerning Kuthayyir, it is through the lover's branding of the beloved's body through the exposure of her secret that the male-male interaction between the lover and husband is enacted. The bloodstain, which she unsuccessfully tries to conceal, becomes the emblem of her unchastity. 'Azza functions as a vehicle for an exchange of pornographic signs between the figures of the lover and husband. Not only is she used as a blotter for her lover's blood but she also becomes a conduit for her husband's obscenities when she is coerced by him into publicly uttering an epithet in the lover's presence. Hence, female unchastity is both sensationalized and sensualized in the interaction between the men, in the exchange between the lovers and husbands.

Moreover, these narratives always feature three parties: the poet-lover, the beloved, and either explicitly or implicitly, the husband or the bride's father figure. In a case of reversal, eloquence in language (revelation) is linked with the female beloved, and abstruseness of language (secrecy) is connected with the male lover. We notice that it is Laylā who is depicted as pouring the butter into Majnūn's cup. The wooden cup, *qa' b*, that Majnūn holds also has linguistic connotations: *qa' ba al-kalām* means "to speak abstrusely" and *qa' b al-kalām* means "depth of speech." Hence, the beloved is associated with volubility of language and the poet-lover is depicted as the speaker of abstruse or esoteric language. Another instance of the blurring of gender roles lies in the fact that the figures of both the beloved and lover act as the conveyors/purveyors of the butter: in the first anecdote, the beloved Laylā is shown handing over the butter to her lover, whereas in the second, it is the lover Kuthayyir who is depicted as giving the urn of butter to 'Azza.

The triangle and the exchange of secrets and tropes

In the afore-cited narrative from *Kuthayyir 'Azza*, the lover and husband exchange the beloved's secret for an obscene epithet. Once again, 'Abbāsīd processes of primitivizing and exotification of the 'Uḏhrī Bedouin models of femininity and masculinity read both the secret and the epithet as concerned with female sexuality. 'Azza is the carrier of the sexually charged blood stain from her lover to her husband, and then she again conveys an epithet (concerned with fornication) from her husband to her lover.

The following anecdote from the story of *Majnūn Laylā* also exhibits an exchange between the lover and the beloved's husband. Majnūn's verses here are an example of how the rhapsodizing of a beloved (*tashbīb*) can shade into a satirization (*hijā'*).

[Word] reached Majnūn . . . that Laylā's husband had spoken of him, reviling and cursing him as well as saying: Has Majnūn's temerity reached [such a

degree] that he claims Laylā's love and parades her name? Then [Majnūn], in order to enrage him, recited:

If there is among you a husband of Laylā it is me – by the Lord of the Throne – I have already kissed her mouth eight times.

And I swear by God that I have seen her, when twenty of her fingers were (wrapped) around my back.

Is it not an incomparable catastrophe that she was married to that dog and not granted to me?

(p. 75)

Here, Majnūn openly declaims poetry in which he advertises sexual secrets about his beloved, Laylā, ostensibly so as to insult and antagonize her husband. Lover and husband engage in a verbal joust with each other whereby one publicly divulges female secrets and the other publicly issues obscenities. Divulgence of female secrets is syntactically linked with the utterance of obscenities. The mention of Laylā's "twenty fingers" in this poem refers to both fingers and toes. The phrase "*twenty of her fingers were [wrapped] around my back*" evokes a graphic image of the beloved with her fingers and toes entwined around the lover's back. The reference to her mouth having been kissed, not twice, not thrice, but rather eight times conjures up a sexually laden image of an unsealed female orifice exposed to the lover's repeated caresses. These bodily images of the beloved are her secrets and Majnūn advertises them in retaliation for being made the public target of her husband's invectives. By pandering the beloved's sexual secrets to her husband, the lover partakes in a rivalry (not devoid of homoerotic elements) with the latter. As we shall see, there are certain parallels between the act of a poet-lover publicizing secrets about his beloved to her husband and a poet's declamation of verses about his beloved to a rival poet in love with her. Sharing speech about a beloved is made analogous to sexually sharing the beloved herself. Through this symbolic sharing of a woman, a form of male homoerotic bonding between the rivals is facilitated.

Yet another example of a triangulated exchange involving Majnūn, Laylā's husband, and the beloved (or speech about the beloved) is cited here. Majnūn is again shown disclosing intimate secrets about Laylā to her husband in an encounter between them:

Majnūn passed by Laylā's husband, who was sitting, warming himself by a fire during a chilly day. He [Laylā's husband] had come to Majnūn's neighborhood to [see] his paternal cousin for something. So [the poet] stopped and began to recite:

By God, have you embraced Laylā shortly before dawn or kissed her mouth?

Have Laylā's tresses gleamed upon you, a sprig of chamomile in her bosom?

Then Majnūn scooped some burning embers in both his palms, letting go of them only when he fell down unconscious. The embers spilled out of the burned palms of his hands and he bit his lips, cutting them. Laylā's husband got up, dismayed and stunned by his action, and walked off.

(p. 24)

Here also Majnūn declaims verses in which rhapsody or *tashbīb* mingles with satire or *hijā*. Not just the erotic nature of the verses, but the very act of declaiming verses about his beloved to another man, especially to her husband, result in the denigration and exotification of the beloved's sexuality. The mention of embracing and kissing his beloved at night, as well as the references to her bosom and tresses rather explicitly portray his intimacy with Laylā. His rhetorical use of the interrogative (that is, "have you . . . ?") is an invitation to the husband to engage in a verbal joust over who has a greater claim to intimacy with Laylā. The rhetorical "have you . . . ?" actually masks Majnūn's sentiment that "you [the husband] have not . . . not like I have."

Majnūn's act of poetic declamation about his beloved) to a man who is himself attached to the beloved has erotic significance. As soon as he ends his declamation to the husband, the poet is shown burning his palms, swooning and biting his lips – images that are somewhat evocative of sexual excitement.²³ Through the act of versifying and proclaiming a physical intimacy with Laylā, through the act of performing this in front of the man who is her husband, the poet-lover introduces an element of homoeroticism in the fortuitous encounter between the two men.

Both men are also symbolically linked to Laylā through their contact with the fire. Fire imagery is often employed in the medieval love discourse as a metaphor for *'Ishq* (passion or desire). But contact with fire, in the aforementioned passage, could also act as a metaphor for intimacy with the beloved. Majnūn is depicted burning his hands with the fire's embers, whereas her husband, in contrast, warms himself with the fire's heat. The marked contrast between how each character is shown making contact with the fire is suggestive of two radically different love relations: love as a highly romanticized but destructive phenomenon, symbolized by Majnūn's searing of his hands, versus a conservative perception of love as essentially a functional phenomenon, symbolized in the husband's use of the fire as a source of comfort.

Poets trading tropes about women

In the 'Abbāsīd-era codification of the *Majnūn Laylā* romance, there exist a number of narratives that attribute Majnūn's madness to his hearing verses about Laylā recited by a rival male poet. These love triangles generally depict the following situation: a poet (perhaps also bearing the nickname Majnūn) recites to Majnūn verses in which he proclaims that both of them are in love with Laylā. Upon hearing these verses, Majnūn becomes confused and loses his mind. An example of this type of love triangle, as I have mentioned elsewhere, is:

Ibn al-'Arabī said: Mu'ādh ibn Kulayb was mad (*majnūn*) and was in love with Laylā. Sharing in this love for her was Muzāhim ibn al-Ḥārith al-'Uqaylī. Muzāhim one day said to the mad one:

Both of us, O Mu'ādh, love Laylā, in me and in you there is Laylā's dust,
I am your partner in the loving of one who has been
your and my destiny, [there is] only torment from
loving her.
She has befuddled your mind and enveloped my heart
which has become crazed and ill.

It is said: Indeed when he heard these verses, he became mixed up and deranged.²⁴

(p. 7)

Here, the triangulated erotic exchange is present in the act of a man's declamation of poetry about a female beloved to a male rival poet. Ostensibly, what is being expressed in the anecdote is competing male desires for the same female beloved. But actually the verses are suggestive of a partnership in the love trial. Muzāhim explicitly uses the term *sharaka fī ḥubbiḥā* ('to share love of her') and he emphasizes their collective experience and destiny in this trial. There are many similarities between this configuration and another (to be discussed shortly) involving the act of a man verbally describing a woman to a male listener who then becomes infatuated with this image. Here again, sharing words about a beloved is made analogous to sexually sharing the beloved herself. Rene Girard's and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's findings on the erotic triangle indicate that "the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved."²⁵ True, that this bond between the two men is not devoid of hostility. But it is for this reason that Sedgwick uses the word "desire" rather than "love" to designate the erotic component in homosocial relationships. Her use of the word "desire" is "analogous to the psychoanalytic use of 'libido' – not for a particular affective state or emotion, but for the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship."²⁶ Likewise, Peter Erickson has pointed out that both male rivalry and male friendship are encompassed by the concept of male bonding.

A striking example of poets trading tropes about each other's beloveds is found in an exchange between the 'Uḏhrī poet Jamīl and his bard, Kuthayyir (also an 'Uḏhrī poet), as recorded in the romance of *Jamīl Buthayna*.²⁷ In this exchange, Jamīl recites to Kuthayyir the latter's own verse about 'Azza, and Kuthayyir declaims to Jamīl the latter's own verse about Buthayna. A mirroring relation between poet and his bard is certainly depicted in Kuthayyir's act of uttering Jamīl's verse to Jamīl himself; by mimicking Jamīl to Jamīl, Kuthayyir mirrors back to Jamīl the latter's poetic eloquence and love relation with the beloved. But there exists an interesting triangulated erotic exchange just in the very act of Kuthayyir's declamation of Jamīl's verse about his beloved, Buthayna, to Jamīl

himself or in the act of Jamīl's declamation of Kuthayyir's verse about 'Azza to Kuthayyir himself.

By stepping into Jamīl's poetic shoes and donning his poetic persona, however briefly, Kuthayyir is shown modeling a love relation with Jamīl's beloved. Jamīl becomes the third-party voyeur witnessing Kuthayyir performing an act of poetic intimacy with Buthayna, his beloved. Likewise, Kuthayyir also enacts the role of the third-party voyeur when he is the audience for Jamīl's performance of an act of poetic intimacy with 'Azza, his (Kuthayyir's) beloved.

Taking Kuthayyir's declamation of Jamīl's verses to Jamīl himself as an example, and recalling the multiple links between speech and sex in these romances, the triangulated erotic exchange may be delineated thus: Kuthayyir bonds with Jamīl through presenting speech about the latter's beloved to him; Kuthayyir also vicariously models intimacy with Jamīl's beloved by declaiming Jamīl's love verses addressed to Buthayna; the bond between Jamīl and his beloved – the third vector of the triangle – is already implicit in the text of the verses themselves. What is also striking about this exchange is that both poets preface their respective recitations with the phrase "do you know why Buthayna (or 'Azza) was disgraced and divulged by your saying." Hence, Jamīl's verses that Kuthayyir declaims to Jamīl are presumably among the verses that impugned Buthayna's chastity, verses that indiscreetly divulged his passion for Buthayna, and thereby, dishonored her. Hence, when each poet-lover is shown mirroring to the other the other's spoken indiscretions, then each is shown mirroring to the other the other's sexual license with his beloved.

Yet another instance of how poetic speech binds all three members of the triangle to one another is found in a narrative involving Jamīl as a poet-dispatcher and Kuthayyir as a poet-messenger. The anecdote cited here, is from the Aghānī rendition of the romance of *Jamīl Buthayna*. Anxious because he cannot remember the place for an upcoming tryst he has with Buthayna, Jamīl persuades his bard, Kuthayyir, to visit his beloved's tents in order to confirm this appointment. Before he dispatches Kuthayyir, he describes to the latter his last meeting with Buthayna, and among the things that he relates is that it occurred while his beloved's maid-servant was washing a dress. Kuthayyir then broaches to Jamīl an idea concerning how he may be able to use this bit of information to indirectly elicit a response from Buthayna when he is there.

Kuthayyir said to him: How do you feel about my acting out some verses, when I go to her encampment, in which I mention this clue if I am not able to be alone with her? He [Jamīl] said: That is the right thing. So he sent him to her. He [Kuthayyir] said to him: Wait for me. Then Kuthayyir set out until he was lodged with them. Her father said to him: What do you have to offer? He said: Three verses occurred to me, so I would like to present them to you. He said: Bring them. Kuthayyir said: So I recited them to him while Buthayna was listening:

Then I said to her: O 'Azza, my friend was sent to you as a messenger – the one entrusted is the one dispatched –

to establish between you and me a tryst
and so that you may command me what I should do in this matter.
My last tryst with you was the day you met me in the
bottommost valley of al-Dūm while the robe was being washed.

He said: Then Buthayna slapped the side of her tent curtain and said: Beat it! Beat it! Her father said to her: What is the matter, Buthayna? She said: While folk are sleeping, a dog, from behind the hill, keeps harassing us. Next, she said to her maidservant: Get us firewood from al-Daumat so that we may slaughter and stew a sheep for Kuthayyir. Then, Kuthayyir said: I am in too much of a hurry for that. He went to Jamīl and informed him, and Jamīl said: The tryst is in al-Daumat. She [Buthayna] remarked to Umm al-Ḥusayn and Laylī, daughters of her maternal aunt, with whom she was on intimate and trustworthy terms: Indeed, I perceived that Jamīl was behind what seemed like Kuthayyir's serenade. So Kuthayyir and Jamīl set out until they came to al-Daumat and Buthayna arrived with her companion. They were together until dawn broke. Kuthayyir used to say: I never saw a gathering that was finer than that and there is no empathy like the one each had for the mind and heart of the other. I do not know which of the two was more understanding [of the other].²⁸

Through the success of the rhetorical stratagem, Kuthayyir's bond with Jamīl, his poet-mentor, is affirmed. The agent of this stratagem is Kuthayyir himself who, in effect, acts as the go-between for a meeting between the lovers. Also, Kuthayyir creates a form of intimacy between himself and Jamīl's beloved, Buthayna, merely by invoking his beloved, 'Azza, as a mirror for Buthayna. By poetically rendering 'Azza as a stand-in for Buthayna and by presenting himself as the stand-in for Jamīl, Kuthayyir succeeds in drawing Buthayna's attention to the matter at hand. Certainly, the poetic charade enacted by Kuthayyir allows for the confirmation of Jamīl's tryst with Buthayna. It is interesting that Kuthayyir is shown accompanying Jamīl when he embarks on the trip for the rendezvous. In Kuthayyir's sentimental tribute to the mutuality of understanding between the two lovers, there is something of a wishfulness to partake in this relation between the two, and to model his relationship with 'Azza after theirs.

The *Majnūn Laylā* narrative in which the poet falls in love with Laylā through a third party report of her is another effective example of a triangulated erotic exchange involving speech about a woman. Majnūn initially falls in love with a description of Laylā narrated by a third party. Assuming that the performer of the speech act that describes her is a man, this narrative could be interpreted as additional evidence for the fact that it is always a Bedouin woman who is possessed by (even if just verbally) or attached to another man with whom the poet-lover falls in love. Given the connections between speech and sex in the romance, the act of a man verbally describing and unveiling the traits of a woman is suggestive of an erotic association with or possession of this woman.²⁹ Just as, earlier in the chapter, the phenomenon of each of the two men (al-Mundhir and al-Ḥasan) desiring Ḥafṣa whenever she is attached to the other suggests that a homoerotic

component is present in the men's relations, the phenomenon of Majnūn desiring Laylā when he hears a description of her narrated by a male third party implies a degree of homoeroticism in the link between the two men. Majnūn as the audience of this verbal performance "falls in love" with the female image generated by the male performer. Hence, the triangulated erotic dimensions of the speech-act are evident, as are the 'Abbāsīd processes of primitivizing and exotification of Bedouin 'Uḏhrī models of femininity and masculinity. If Majnūn falls in love with Laylā through dissemination of speech about her, likewise the circulation of his own poetry about her also advertises her. Also, the man who marries Laylā, in Aḥmad Shawqī's modern adaptation of this romance to drama, falls in love with her upon hearing Majnūn's poetry about her.

Not just the Bedouin 'Uḏhrī corpus of love stories and poetry but even 'Umarī narrative and verse is characterized by the love triangle motif. In the following anecdote concerning 'Umar ibn Abī Rabi'a that is related by the 'Abbāsīd litterateur and compiler Ibn Qutayba, the configuration of the erotic triangle consists of 'Umar, the poet-lover, his pious brother, and one of 'Umar's female paramours.

His brother al-Ḥārith was very religious and chaste. He used to remonstrate with him and chide him from day to day. 'Umar related: I had, on that day, a rendez-vous with al-Thurayyā. He said: I went to the mosque at sunset and al-Thurayyā came (for the appointment). She found al-Ḥārith reclining upon his bed and so she threw herself on top of him, not doubting that it was him ['Umar]. He then leapt up and said: Who are you? [She] said to him. Al-Thurayyā. Then he observed: I do not see 'Umar benefiting from our rigours. ['Umar] said: I came for the appointment and did not know what had transpired and he [al-Ḥārith] approached me and said: Woe to thee! We almost, by God, were seduced after you [left]. By God, if I felt anything, [it was only because] al-Thurayyā, your paramour, fell on top of me. 'Umar said: Never will fire singe you after [having been with] her! [Al-Ḥārith] said: Upon you and her the curse of God!³⁰

At the beginning of this chapter, I noted that the third party to whom the 'Uḏhrī lover loses his beloved marries the woman in question. This seems to confirm the link between the pattern of triangulation and marriage in the 'Uḏhrī romance.

Notes

- 1 Certainly, the existence of the erotic triangle in romance and lyric is a well-documented fact. Sigmund Freud's essays "A Special Type of Object Choice Made by Men" and "The Taboo of Virginity" help illuminate some aspects of this triangle. Sigmund Freud, *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963).
- 2 A number of Qur'ānic references to female modesty and chastity are literally references to the concealment and protection of female genitalia. See, for example 24: 30–31, 4: 51, and 21: 91.
- 3 Ruqayya Y. Khan, *Self and Secrecy in Early Islam*, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), chapters 4 and 5.

- 4 Cf. Ibid. The etymology of *sirr* indicates this: the fifth and tenth form of the verb *sarra* (derived from *sirr*) mean "to take to oneself a [female] concubine-slave." A *surriyya* is a female concubine-slave and a *sirriyya* is "a free woman with whom one has sexual intercourse secretly" or a prostitute.
- 5 With reference to early Islamic marriage practices, Gertrude Stern notes that "the constant use of *khalaḥa* is significant. It is generally used to denote the second or subsequent marriages of a woman, a certain man is said 'to succeed' to a certain woman . . . The constant use of the term points to a frequent interchange of wives." *Marriage in Early Islam*, Vol. 18 (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1939), 72.
- 6 According to Jaroslav Stetkevych, "[ʿAqīq] Is a Metaphor of Sweetness, Joy, and Garden Surroundings, Too, and It Is a Poetic Convention." *The Zephvrs of Najd* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 112. "ʿAqīq" literally means "a cleft, split, slit, ripped or rent; and cut; any channel which the water of a torrent has cloven; a valley; pools of water in cleft furrows; red sand or clay." Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 vols. (Lahore: Islamic Book Centre, 1978).
- 7 *The Epistle on Singing-Girls of Jāhiz*, trans. A.F.L. Beeston, *Approaches to Arabic Literature*, no. 2 (England: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1980), 19.
- 8 This phenomenon of each of the two men (al-Mundhir and al-Ḥasan) desiring Ḥaḥṣa whenever she is attached to the other suggests that possibly a homoerotic component is present in the men's relations. Susan Crane has observed that a "way of building courtship into men's relations is the triangulated erotic rivalry of two men for one woman." Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 49.
- 9 Catherine Bates notes that in western comedy, "the curtain traditionally falls at the point when courtship ends and when the lovers marry . . . Nothing remains to write about since, as Congreve put it, courtship is to marriage as 'a very witty prologue to a very dull play.'" *The Rhetoric of Courtship in Elizabethan Language and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 20.
- 10 There are also numerous triangulations involving messengers and envoys who are not poets (that is, the traveler or the slavewoman who acts as a carrier of messages between the lover and beloved).
- 11 *Jamīl Buthayna* in the *Aghānī*, 8: 144.
- 12 Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 111.
- 13 In the *Qays Lubnā* romance as recorded in the *Aghānī*, triangulations proliferate. Among the most prominent are Qays-Lubnā-husband (Lubnā's second husband), as well as Qays-Lubnā-wife (Qays' second wife, from the tribe of Fazara, who is also named Lubnā!). See Hilary Kilpatrick, "Aḥbār Manzūma: The Romance of Qays and Lubnā in the Aḡānī," *Festschrift Ewald Wagner Zum 65. Geburtstag*, *Studien zur Arabischen Dichtung*, Band 2 (Beirut: Beirut Texts and Studies, 1994), 351–361.
- 14 The contrast between Qays, a Bedouin camel-seller, and Lubnā's husband, a townsman, is made quite stark in this passage.
- 15 *Qays Lubnā* in *Aghānī*, 9: 144.
- 16 E. K. Sedgewick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 182.
- 17 Regarding the combat scene in this anecdote, it may be noted that Susan Crane has argued that courtship between men and women has antecedents in the combative and fraternal relations between men – "courtship appears . . . [to be] an overt sexualizing and regendering of chivalry's combative and fraternal components." Crane, *Gender and Romance*, 48.
- 18 In these two passages, the word *samn* also could be interpreted to signify both chaste (secret) speech and chaste femininity. The word *samīn*, morphologically related to *samun*, means "fat, chaste, abundant." *Kalīm samīn* means "chaste speech" as well as "chaste, eloquent or excellent language." Arab literary critics of the Middle Ages, like Ibn Qutayba, often described language using corporeal words such as "fat" and "lean."

- In *Ta'wil*, Ibn Qutayba contrasts the terms *samin* and *ghaththa* with reference to language: the former means “plump or good language,” whereas the latter means “lean language” and “bad speech.” Ibn. Qutayba, *Ta'wil*, 11. Language that is characterized as *samin* is speech that is rich in allegorical and metaphorical meanings. Such language is also described as “chaste” precisely because it is full of concealed allegorical meanings, and chastity, we must remember, is intimately connected with secrecy in the medieval Arabic discourse on love. Some of Suzanne Stetkevych's work suggests that the symbolism of a blood vs. milk dichotomy is important in early Arabic literature. Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 208–210.
- 19 As per note 18 in my Ch. 7: see G. Van Gelder, “ta ‘adjdub,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition. It “is literally ‘amazement,’ a term of rhetoric. It is found, together with its active counterpart *ta’djīb* (‘causing amazement’) in the Aristotelian tradition (Ibn Sīnā, Ḥāzim al-Ḳarṭādjannī [q.vv.]).” According to Van Gelder, this “‘amazement,’ which is in fact usually ‘feigned amazement,’ is related to concepts such as *ighrāb* or *istighrāb* (‘evoking wonder’), found in works of poetics since Ḳudāma b. Dja’far [q.v.], and lies at the basis of the common figure of *badī’* called *taḍjāhul al-‘arīf*, ‘feigned ignorance.’”
 - 20 *Kuthayyir ‘Azza* in *Aghānī*, 9: 29.
 - 21 Self-mutilation appears to be a standard metaphor in the medieval love discourses. In the Qur’ānic Yūsuf story, the women “accidentally” cut themselves with knives upon seeing him, knives that have been handed them to cut fruit. Also, there exist parallels between the Kuthayyir anecdote and a scene from the *Tristan* romance. In this scene, Tristan’s blood stains the bed of his paramour, resulting in the husband’s discovery of his wife’s adultery. Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan and Isolde*, trans. Edwin H. Zeydel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 148–149.
 - 22 The contemporary Bahraini poet, Qassim Haddad, has exploited this aspect in his rendering of the episode: Qays ibn al-Mulawwah was asked: “What is the most extraordinary thing that happened to you with Laylā?” He said: “One night guests knocked on our family’s door, but we had no provisions. So my father sent me to my uncle al-Mahdī’s to ask for help. I stood by his tent, and he said: ‘What do you want?’ So I told him. He called out: ‘Laylā, dear, bring out the vat. Fill this boy’s container with ghee.’ So she brought forth the vessel and started pouring the clarified butter. While close to each other we began to whisper. Our fingers entwined. Suddenly the ooze poured over my small pot gushing everywhere. I kneeled sipping the excess from her fingers, moving my mouth up the inner side of her arm. She was pushing me away, but I continued to her shoulders from which her breasts swelled – the unguent liquid leading me to her throat. She was shaking, pushing me away. I inserted my lips where the breasts joined together; her chemise had begun to fall down and away because of the butter racing everywhere. I was tracing its flow finding panthers and tigers bouncing at my face. She said: ‘Take my chemise.’ So I did, and she said: ‘Take me,’ so I took her. She said: ‘You covered me, now expose me,’ so I exposed her – not knowing how the butter made us gush and clot. She said: ‘By God, your madness measures well against the reason of the Banu ‘Āmir, and the first of them is sitting inside this tent’ – meaning her father.” www.jehat.com/en/Poets/Qassim%20Haddad/Pages/Qassim23-12-2012.aspx
 - 23 See Manzalaoui’s mention of how swooning may have certain sexual connotations. M. Manzalaoui, “Swooning Lovers: A Theme in Arab and European Romance,” *Comparative Criticism* 8 (1986): 71–90.
 - 24 There seems to be a difference between the references to Majnūn’s madness at the beginning and end of this passage. In the passage’s beginning, his madness is a poetic trope. However, toward the end of the passage, Majnūn becomes deranged upon hearing another man’s *tashbīb* of his beloved. This latter form of mental disturbance seems less poetic and more pathological.
 - 25 Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 21.

26 Ibid., 2.

27 *Jamīl Buthayna* in the *Aghānī*, 8: 109.

28 Ibid., 106–107.

29 One is reminded of the links between poetic *wasf* and sexual intrigue in the incidents concerning the pre-Islamic poet al-Nābigha's poem "al-Mutajarrida" ("The Lady Divested"). The poem was composed at the request of the poet's patron and friend, al-Nu'mān, king of al-Hīra, and the king specifically requested that the queen be described nude from head to foot. It is further related that "the poet al-Munakhkhal . . . a secret lover of al-Mutajanida, became jealous of hearing al-Nābigha's description, and insinuated into al-Mu'man's mind that al-Nābigha must have had a love affair with her – whereupon the poet prudently left the court of al-Hīra." Tayib, Abdullah el. "Pre-Islamic Poetry." A. Beeston, et al., eds., "Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 60.

30 'Umar b. Abī Rabi'a. in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 1: 240–241.

Conclusion

One way to shed light on the great popularity of *Majnūn Laylā* during the ‘Abbāsīd-era in Baghdad especially is to set forth an approximate genre analogy with modern twentieth-century American culture: the film subgenre of the American “Western.” American western films mainly reflect the urban fascination with and romanticizing of a particular hero, i.e., the cowboy, in the mid-twentieth century, post-World War II cities and metropolises of the United States. The story time in this film genre is set at least one hundred fifty years earlier, during perhaps the mid- to late nineteenth century – before the onset of the crucial late phases of industrialization and urbanization. This is similar with the mid-ninth century, urban ‘Abbāsīd cultural fascination with and romanticizing of stories of legendary Bedouin poet-lovers, especially with Majnūn as the epitome of this kind of hero. The story time of such stories is also established about two centuries earlier – before the onset of the crucial mature phases of the Greco-Arabian revolution and its absorption and acculturation. The Western movie genre embraced as its story elements and themes the following: the wild frontier and its associations with unfettered freedom and a less complicated non-urban era; a male country hero, the cowboy, who prevails over the bad guys, woos and serenades “the girl” and in so doing, wins the praise of the community and ultimately wins his beloved. All this held an amusing and yet serious fascination for especially late twentieth century highly developed, urbane, urban and suburban milieus of post-World War II America so far removed such a context. Likewise, the elements of the Arabian, Bedouin desert frontier and its associations with perhaps a simpler, rustic time and a rather sentimental, swooning poet-lover, who “slays and is slain by a damsel,” and who challenges the social order through his passionate ardor for one idealized Beloved – this type of alterity held a playful fascination for particularly the late tenth-century jaded urban court circles in Baghdad of the fragmented, strife-ridden ‘Abbāsīd empire of the time.

The historical convergence of timelines between the popularization of this particular romance, *Majnūn Laylā* and the ‘Abbāsīd-era translation projects of Greek knowledge to Arabic has gone unexamined by critics. Granted, the Greek dimensions of and within the love story of *Majnūn Laylā*, in particular, are significant and cannot be underestimated. As analyzed by Asad Khairallah and others, the triadic dimensions of love, poetry, and madness that are integral to *Majnūn Laylā* bear Greek antecedents. The Galenic motifs of love as malady and their connections with madness are prominent.

Indeed, the entirety of 'Abbāsīd-era Arabic and Persian language love literatures, including the meta-discourse on love, are heavily informed by ideas, concepts and motifs from a kind of synthesis of Greek, Hellenistic, Platonic, Jewish, and Perso-Sassanian intellectual and cultural legacies. It is significant that this meta-discourse has an epistemology. Epistemologically, this meta-discourse, for example, often organizes itself in terms of citations from and references to the two prevailing knowledge branches often glossed as "the lore and opinions of the ancients" (*hākīm*, pl. *hukamā*, including the ancient philosophers and physicians) and "the lore and opinions of the scholars" (i.e., *ālīm*, pl. *ulamā*). In addition to this, this discourse sets up subsidiary branches, again, often variously categorized and labelled in and through the rubric of "the lore and opinion of the Bedouin Arabs" and/or that of "the theologians" and/or that of "the Sufis."

As stated in the Introduction, the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* is a 'boy meets girl story' but this book maintains that it is also an 'Abbāsīd Islamic narrative of identity formation in and through engagement with the construct of the "Bedouin cosmos" discussed in the Introduction. When the phrase "Bedouin cosmos" has been invoked throughout this book, it is something imagined, devised, disseminated and/or engaged with by the 'Abbāsīd Islamic empire (as the apogee of classical Islamic civilization) mainly within its urban, metropolitan capital of Baghdad. Consequently, it refers to an urban, cosmopolitan collection of images pertaining to the Arab nomadic Bedouins because it originates and functions principally in urban and urbane contexts and milieus. This book has examined the Islamic 'Abbāsīd empire's recurrent engagement with and departure from iterations of the Bedouin cosmos in and through an analysis of the love story of *Majnūn Laylā*. There is a play of various "Bedouin cosmoses" (including their waxing and waning) after the Greek revolution in ideas during mid-to-late 'Abbāsīd culture and society, and I maintain that the romance of *Majnūn Laylā* functions as an important literary conveyor in and through which to witness and understand this play. There were multiple forms of Bedouin cosmoses at play, including several iterations of the 'Abbāsīd urbanized image of the Bedouin cosmos as either the idealized, Islamic foundation or the pagan irreverent non-Muslim other. Furthermore, there consisted the 'Abbāsīd urbanized playful images of the exoticized, romanticized Bedouin cosmos and its Bedouin Arab primitive – not to mention the 'Abbāsīd constructs of the "paganized, impious" Umayyads that resonate with the image of the Bedouins as the outsiders to the new Islamic order.

A primary goal of this book has been to draw attention to and explicate the mechanisms of the ideological and cultural work that the *Majnūn Laylā* story performed for 'Abbāsīd urbanite elite (including imperial) audiences in the wake of the paradigm shift that occurred in the 'Abbāsīd empire after the Greco-Arabian intellectual revolution. I have shed light upon the processes of othering and primitivizing Majnūn in the romance of *Majnūn Laylā*. First, I have shown how 'Abbāsīd Muslim Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian identities and their memory-construction of and relation to the past (Bedouin, Umayyad, etc.) relied chiefly upon processes of alterity and primitivism. Second, I have examined the ways in which the exotifying, romanticizing and othering of constructions of masculinities and femininities (e.g., eroticized love triangles) are employed in these very

processes of alterity and primitivism. Evidently, the Abbāsīd elite, urban interrogations of the multiple categories of ethnicity, culture, identity, religion and language within the cosmopolitan capital of Baghdad were performed in and through assessments and reassessments of women and men, gender relations, and sexuality. In our Arabic love story, the presence of “cultural primitivism” primarily functions through the motif of the romanticization of the Bedouin, “a literary creation of that ‘Abbāsīd urban period” as well as through a related motif of “nostalgic longing, yearning for the homeland.” Of course, constructions of gender and sexuality are very germane to this processes of primitivizing Majnūn – and such constructions function as markers of “otherness,” “strangeness” and “foreignness” in and through the ‘Abbāsīd interrogations of the multiple categories of ethnicity, culture, identity, religion, and language present in their cosmopolitan milieus. In other words, this book has sought to demonstrate how gender and sexuality have important uses in delineating certain crucial aspects of male ‘Abbāsīd male identity formation within the context of Arabo-Islamic urban culture and society.

Overall, one must observe that no doubt the ‘Abbāsīd-era changes wrought by the large-scale, widely supported, successive Greco-Arabian and Greco-Persian translation movements and their concomitant influences were monumental. However, it is the case that their impact was experienced in ways subtle and yet profound in terms of ‘Abbāsīd-era male identity-formation; such influences were screened in and modulated, and this is eminently gauged in and through the (re)construction, appropriation and reception of the *Majnūn Laylā* story.

Glossary

- ‘Abbāsīd Age** ‘Abbāsīd empire, the reign of which spanned 750–1258 CE; capital Baghdad.
- ‘Abbāsīd *ghazal*** a love poem with “courtly” qualities; especially one composed by ‘Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf.
- akhbār al-‘arab*** mainly Abbāsīd-era Muslim authored semi-historical chronicles of early days of Arab Bedouin [cf. *‘arabiyyun*] tribes.
- al-Iṣfahānī, Abū al-Faraj** tenth-century compiler and author of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* or *Book of Songs*.
- al-Jāhiliyya** an emic gloss by later Muslims referring to the era preceding the arrival and establishment of Islam; “the pre-Islamic era of ignorance and impetuosity”; spanning approximately 400–500 CE.
- ‘arabiyyun** a romanticizing literary construct of the ‘Abbāsīd urban period and pertaining to three core ideas: of or about the “desert of Arabia,” nomadic, and often but not always a “connotation of ‘freedom’ from [Islamic] religiosity.”
- ‘ashīra** small subgroup of a tribe or the closest or nearest relations by kin descent from the same father or ancestor.
- Bedouin** often invoked in later Muslim-authored sources to refer to the quintessential Arab nomad who belonged to a tribe, many of whom converted to Islam.
- bint ‘amm** paternal, first cousin, but it does not have to be confined to this and may broadly be extended to first cousin once removed or even farther kin relationships, such as second or third cousin.
- courtly** “of or pertaining to the [caliphal] court [e.g., ‘Abbāsīd court in Baghdad]; bearing “courtly” connotations of song, poetry and/or dance subcultures at the “court”; also “courtly” or elegant – *ẓarīf* culture signified through elegant clothes or jewelry or other kinds of external symbols
- dīwān*** anthology, collection, often of poems.
- Eros, eros** Greek-based idea of passionate love, for which the Arabic term is *Ishq* or *‘ishq*.
- ghazal*** term for love poem, arose in Arabic literary context but other non-Arabic Islamic civilizational literatures also later employed it (e.g., the Urdu *ghazal* in Indo-Muslim milieu); in the early Arabic context, there is the Umayyad *ghazal* (of which the ‘Uḍhrī is one variety); the ‘Abbāsīd *ghazal*.

Ḥadīth, ḥadīth canon of the sayings or dicta of the Prophet Muhammad; oral but written down in the ninth century.

hawā destructive, uncontrolled passion, bordering on lust.

hijā' invective, satire, especially in poetic context.

Hijāz, hijāz (or Hijāzī) two meanings: as a proper noun, it refers to the Western flank of the Arabian peninsula; as an adjective, it is also known as the urban *ghazal* (love poetry or love poem) of 'Umar b. Abī Rabī'a originating in the Hijāz.

ibn 'amm paternal (male) cousin; preferred form of marriage among the Bedouin tribes (before and somewhat after the establishment of Islam) was patrilineal cousin marriage, i.e., marriage to a paternal cousin.

Ibn Dāwūd ninth-century belles-lettrist writer and theologian influenced by Greek/Hellenistic notions of love; composed the *Kitāb al-Zahra* (anthology of poetry and exposition of "love") dated about 890 CE; known to be a successor to a literalist school of jurisprudence and theology (Zāhirī), but paradoxically, he espoused non-literalism in his belles-lettres and poetry; was committed to the 'ishq-based concept of passionate love but in its most discreet sense.

Ibn Ḥazm eleventh-century Andalusian jurist and theologian (also Zāhirī school) and litterateur who authored the famous expository treatise on love, *The Ring of the Dove* (also see *Tawq al-Hamama*), which functioned as a manual in the art of love and provided an entertaining view into the Andalusī elite society of the time.

Ibn al-Jawzī twelfth-century jurist, preacher and theologian of the Ḥanbalī school of law and author of the famous, polemical and conservative love treatise *Censure of Passion (Dhamm al-Hawa)*, which stopped short of vilifying the phenomenon of 'Ishq or Eros (i.e., passionate love).

iqtiṣād moderate, balanced; scale of economy, economic system or approximation of such system.

'Ishq or 'ishq passionate love, the synonym for which is *eros*.

Jāhiz, or al-Jāhiz ninth-century essayist, literary critic, theologian and all-around polymath who composed over two hundred diverse works, including two short essays or epistles that take up the topic of 'Ishq or Eros (i.e., passionate love). They are *Risālat fī 'l-Ishq wa l-Nisā* or *The Treatise on Passionate Love and Woman* and *Risālat al-Qīyan* or *The Treatise on Singing Girls*.

Jamīl Buthaynā 'Uḍhrī romance, the lovers of which are Jamil and Buthayna.

jāra neighbor (female).

jinn genie(s), ideas about the jinn among the Arabs supposed that these were beings made of/from smoke/fire; were invisible; and that they dwelled among human communities but were rarely seen; one or more could act as modes of inspiration for poets.

kalām speech, conversation, discourse (speech or conversation with women takes on "sexual" connotations in both poetic and social milieus); derived meanings contain the idea of Kalām as theological discourse or theology.

Kitāb al-Aghānī cf. al-Iṣṣfahānī.

Kitāb al-Zahra (cf. *Book of Flower*) cf. Ibn Dāwūd

Kuthayyir ‘Azza ‘Uḏhrī romance, the lovers of which are Kuthayyir and ‘Azza.
mahr Islamic form of marital financial gift presented and/or pledged by the groom to the bride and/or bride’s family upon marriage.

Majnūn Laylā ‘Uḏhrī romance, the lovers of which are Majnūn and Laylā.

Majnūn his tribal name is Qays ibn al-Mulawwaḥ (not to be confused with the other Qays of *Qays Lubna*); his *laqab* or penname is Majnūn, meaning “one possessed [by jinn], or gone mad, or bereft of reason.”

miswāk toothbrush made from a twig.

mukhannathūn eunuchs.

mutayyamūn those “slain in love.”

Munāzil rustic, Bedouin-type figure found in the *Majnūn Laylā* romance.

Muruwwa manliness; concepts of “manliness” with roots in pre-Islamic and early Islamic eras.

nasīb the first part (love prelude) of the pre-Islamic tri-partite ode or *qaṣīda*.

Nizāmī thirteenth-century Persian litterateur who authored (and reworked the Arabic material) the love story of *Majnūn Laylā* as part of a larger compendium known as *Haft Paykār*.

Nomos, nomos idea or notion of Law or law in the Biblical sense.

qaṣīda tripartite pre-Islamic ode, the first part of which is the love prelude.

Qays Lubnā the ‘Uḏhrī romance, the lovers of which are Qays and Lubna.

qiyān singing girls associated with the court cultures of the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd periods.

rāwī narrator, transmitter.

Ring of the Dove, The (also see *Tawq al-Hamama*) famous eleventh-century treatise on love authored by the Andalusian theologian and litterateur Ibn Ḥazm.

ṣa‘ālīk poetry a form of poetry (stand-alone and integrated with the pre-Islamic ode or *qaṣīda*) featuring liminal, outcast-type tribal “brigand-poets.”

sedimented layered, carrying accretions of material from various chronological contexts due to processes of orality and semi-orality in the Arabic literary context.

Shawqī, Aḥmad twentieth-century Egyptian poet and playwright who authored a modern play based on the classical love story of *Majnūn Laylā*.

tashbīb serenade of the beloved in poetry; “rhapsody [in verse] about a beloved.”

Tawq al-Hamama or Ring of the Dove famous eleventh-century treatise on love authored by the Andalusian theologian and litterateur Ibn Ḥazm (cf. Ibn Ḥazm).

trope (tropic, tropical) broad literary term embracing a set of literary devices such as simile, metaphor, metonymy.

‘Uḏhrī(ite) love love exemplified in verse and narrative (linked with a putative ‘Uḏhrī tribe) that approximates ‘*Ishq*-based love, a feature of which is a rhetoric of unrequited love.

‘Uḏhrī poetry verses or poems (embedded in narratives that constitute love stories) that approximate ‘*Ishq*-based love between a lover-poet and beloved, a feature of which is a rhetoric of unrequited love.

- ‘Uḏhrī Romances/Love Stories** a corpus of “sedimented romance narratives interspersed with verse” that approximate *‘Ishq*-based love between a lover-poet and beloved, a feature of which is a rhetoric of unrequited love; there are at least half a dozen more such love stories.
- ‘Uḏhrī tribe** Banī ‘Uḏhrā tribe located in norther part of the Hijāz, that is, the Arabian peninsula, during the early Umayyad period and possibly before.
- ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī’a (mentioned throughout the book as simply “‘Umar”)** poet born circa 644 CE; thought to be a member of the Meccan aristocracy; specialized in love poetry and composed racy, very suggestive love poems evocative of town-based urban scenes.
- ‘Umarī ghazal** non-sentimental, urban quality (re Mecca and Medina), rakish, often suggestive of a component of physical intimacy; associated mainly with ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī’a.
- Umayyad Age** Umayyad empire, the reign of which spanned circa 660s–750 CE; capital Damascus.
- Umayyad ghazal** at least three different forms of this: Hijāzī, ‘Uḏhrī and ‘Abbāsīd *ghazals*.
- Ward ibn Thaqīf** husband of Layla; wealthy man from the tribe of Thaqīf to whom Laylā (the star beloved in *Majnūn Laylā*) gets married.
- wasf** stylized, embellished verbal description; often a narrated description (akin to portraiture) of a given individual; an important subgenre of poetry in the Arabic context; allowed for intermixing with other subgenres, i.e., *tashbīb* (rhapsody or serenade in verse of a female beloved).
- ẓarīf, also ẓurafā’** elegant, courtly person(s), especially during ‘Abbāsīd era, one who exudes an aura of fine dress, refined polite conduct and elegance in speech and composition; likely receivers of court patronage or connected with an imperial court.

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